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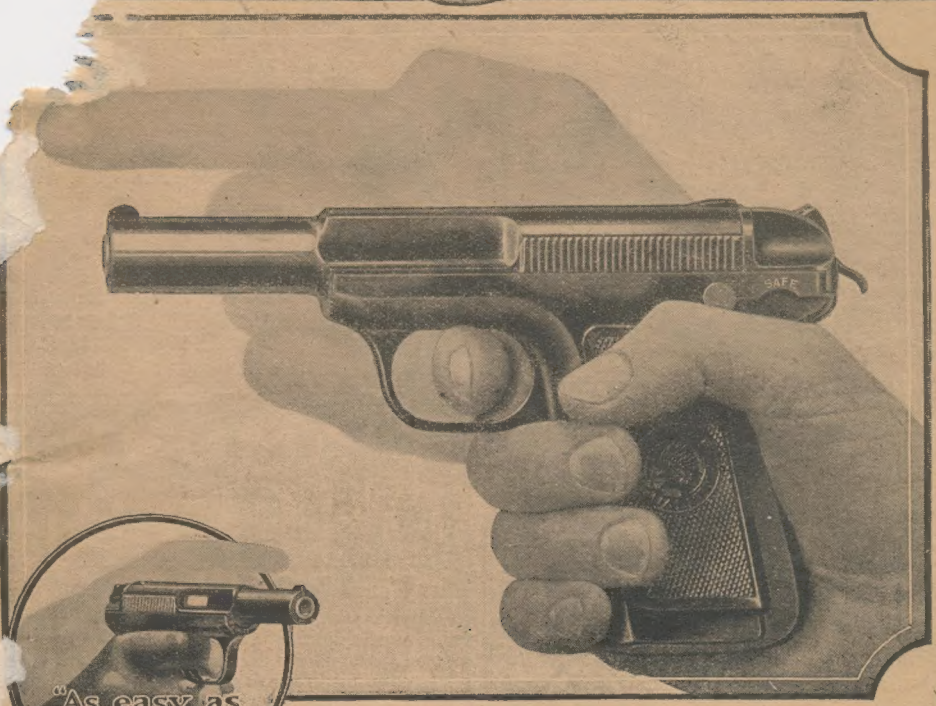

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Volume 26
Number 3

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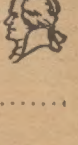

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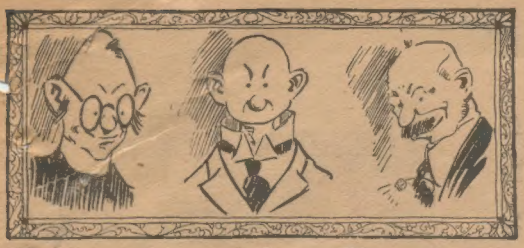

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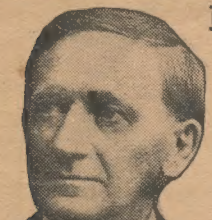

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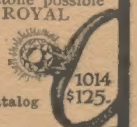

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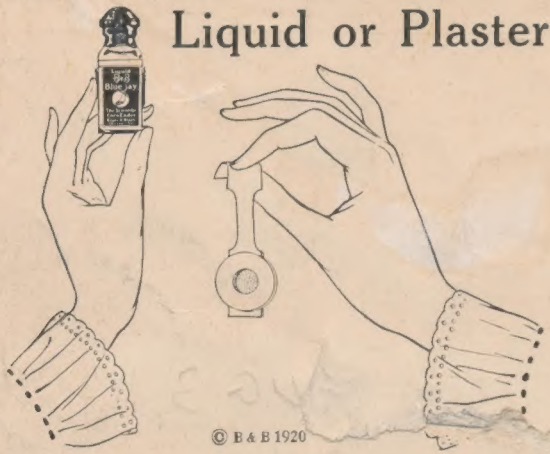

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August 3, 1920
Vol. XXVI, No. 3.

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"Occasionally one of our stories will be called an 'off-the-Trail' story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual run of our stories perhaps a little different perhaps a good deal. It may relate a known experience in a customary manner, or it may be different from the type usually found in this magazine. In all of these cases, the unusual theme, material, ending, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.

IN THE unexplored places of the great Sahara Desert, two French army officers solve an enigma of history and face a mysterious, inevitable doom. Behind the splendor and luxury of an unknown kingdom, there looms a horror which lures and repels, and which even escape can not lessen. "L'Atlantide," a two-part tale by Pierre Benoit, beginning in the next *Adventure*.

The nine other stories in the mid-August issue are mentioned in the Trail Ahead, page 192.

Adventure
August 3, 1920
Vol. XXVI
No. 3

Kings of the Missouri

A Four-Part Story

By Hugh Pendexter

Part I.

Author of "Red Bells," "Gentlemen of the North," etc.

CHAPTER I

SWEETHEARTS AND KNIVES

ST. LOUIS with its strange hodge-podge of humanity bustled feverishly under the late April sun. The permanent inhabitants were respectable and progressive, yet the first impression a stranger was apt to receive was an atmosphere of recklessness, if not lawlessness. This because the city with its seven thousand people was the center of the fur-trade and the temporary haven for desperate characters from east of the Mississippi. Located a scant score of miles below the mouth of the Missouri—the white man's first path to the Rockies and the key to the trans-Mississippian territory—the city yielded nothing to Montreal as a jumping-off place for adventurers of all sorts.

The explorations of Major Zebulon Pike, Captains Lewis and Clark, and Major Stephen H. Long, were from one to two decades old on this particular April day, and yet the people thus far had profited but scantily from the printed reports. There was soon coming a time when a mighty host, impelled by a national impulse to expand, would eagerly consult these sleeping authorities. But St. Louis in 1831 thought and talked of furs, not of peopling a continent. In the streets could be seen the lounging mountain men employed by the Rocky Mountain Fur Company, formed by General William H. Ashley in 1822. The season before these same men, clad in greasy and worn garments of buckskin and buffalo hide, had brought back from the mountains a hundred thousand dollars' worth of beaver. Men of the American Fur Company, the strongest fur organiza-

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tion on the continent with the exception of the Hudson's Bay, were kept at their permanent posts throughout the valley of the Missouri and did not enjoy the license of leave exhibited by Ashley's old men.

Traders also were returning from Santa Fé with huge profits. Trade with the southwest, fur-harvesting in the west and northwest, was the order of the day. There seems to be no record of either trader or trapper seeking wealth beneath the soil. The gold strikes in California, Colorado, Idaho and Montana, were marching down the years but had not yet arrived. Fur was the king of the Western country and beaver was the most sought of all fur-bearing animals. Beaver was to continue holding this eminence until 1833 when John Jacob Astor in London would write to his ossociates in the great A. F. C.—

"It appears they make hats of silk in place of beaver."

But beaver was readily selling from seven to eight dollars a pound this April day, and Ralph Lander hurrying to his work in the A. F. C. store never dreamed of living to see the price reduced. In 1831 there was every reason to believe the price must go up as the supply dwindled. The Rocky Mountain Fur Company specialized in beaver. The Hudson's Bay Company, cut off from a profitable trade in robes because of portage charges, greedily took all it could get. The A. F. C. on the Missouri and its tributaries traded for all pelts, but made a drive for the dam-builders. So neither Lander nor any other man in 1831 could know what a blow inventive genius was to deal the beaver trade two years hence.

Lander knew changes must take place, but he could vision nothing to prevent him from becoming a mountain man, a king of the Missouri. His ideal was Ashley, the implacable rival of the A. F. C. It was Ashley who brought romance to the fur trade and set a new pace by doing away with fixed posts and by sending large bodies of trappers into the beaver country to trap and trade. With Ashley had been associated such men as William L. and Milton Sublette, whose grandfather is credited with slaying Tecumseh at the battle of the Thames, James P. Beckwourth and James Bridger. The A. F. C., clinging to the traditions and practises of the British companies, was hard put to meet the growing opposition of these celebrated mountain men. Diluted alcohol was being exchanged—contrary to the law of the country—for buffalo robes at the rate of a pint for a robe.

Ashley's tactics, followed by his successors, did not pivot on the efficiency of the Indian. His own trappers caught the furs. While the A. F. C. could easily retain a monopoly of the robe trade it found itself worried because of the rich packs taken out of the country by the opposition.

Both the A. F. C. and the opposition were one in not desiring immigration. The opposition, however, was not concerned with any problems of placating and conserving the Indian. One depended for trade on the good-will and efforts of the Indian, the other went in and secured pelts despite the Indian.

Lander was not given to analysis. He knew the steamboat had come to remain a fixture and that the days of the flatboat were over. He knew the keelboat still persisted as a great factor in the upper Missouri trade, but he did not realize it would have followed the flatboat long before his day had not the flimsy structure of the steam craft made steamboat travel hazardous. He worked for the inexorable A. F. C., a huge and smoothly running machine, and he admired the privateering of Ashley's men. He credited the A. F. C. with eliminating British influence in the Indian country. He should have given the credit to the advent of the American steamboat. What neither State, Church, nor Army could effect had been brought about by superstition. The Indian had decided that those who used a "fire canoe" must be more mighty than those who did not.

With epochal changes shaping about him Lander's thoughts remained those of youth in Springtime. The most important thing in the world for him to think about was little Susette Parker, only child of gruff "Hurry-Up" Parker, a valuable cog in the A. F. C.'s St. Louis machinery. The girl had been Lander's inspiration and undoing. She had filled him with ambitions and had robbed him of the power to leave the town and join a mountain expedition and prove his worth. Instead of carving out the future her love must demand, he remained slave to the present and continued packing goods for men who were to live the life.

When the opposition came back from the mountains and the A. F. C. headquarters were blue with profanely expressed rage,

Lander secretly rejoiced at their good fortune and felt the thrill of youth, lusting for the unusual. Even the pack-mules, skinned from withers to tail from carrying two hundred pounds for two thousand miles, urged him to follow their back trail. Whenever an express came down from Fort Union—best built west of the Mississippi with the possible exception of Bent's on the Arkansas—and told of Indian troubles, especially of the undying hatred of the Blackfeet for the whites, he burned to take a pack and gun and steal into the hostile country and try his luck.

When self-respect reproached him for his lack of purpose he defended himself by declaring that no sane man would leave a Susette when she urged him to stay. Susette was spoiled into asking for everything she wanted. She wanted Lander and would not listen to his trying his luck in the Indian country. This eased his conscience, although reason told him he might lose her for all time because he was not strong enough to lose her for a season or two.

Sometimes the fantastic optimism of young years prompted him to scheme immediate marriage, to be followed by venturing into the land of fear and fable. His morning greeting from Hurry-Up Parker always quickly dispelled such nonsense. Parker was hard-headed and damnably practical. The caste of the A. F. C. was in his blood; he would never give his girl to an *engagé*. He might marry an Indian woman himself, if he were posted up-country, but no hired hand, a mere laborer, should dare raise his head high enough to glimpse Susette's pert eyes.

Now that the young people's intimacy had progressed to the exchange of love vows Lander often felt uncomfortable when he paused to wonder what the stern parent would say and do, once he learned the truth. So the affair had made him sly and secretive. His work included the running of many errands and frequently he was sent to the Parker home on Pine Street. Other times he made errands there when he knew Parker was not about. Only Susette and himself were in the secret, and yet there was one man in the store who had taken to staring at him laughingly every time he came back from an errand.

"I've got to strike out," he groaned half aloud as he slowed his steps on nearing the big warehouse and store. "That Malcom Phinny looks too knowing. He'll be telling things before Susette and I are ready. I must get up-river and work up to some position. No more putting off. I must."

He had said this before. He was very serious now, and yet the sight of a familiar figure approaching made him smile and forget love and old Parker. It was Jim Bridger, head partner now in the Rocky Mountain Fur Company. He stood better than six feet, rawboned and straight and of powerful frame. His brown hair was very thick and worn to his shoulders, and his gray eyes were forever taking inventories as he swung his head from side to side. Lander smiled at recollecting some tall stories Bridger was fond of telling.

"GETTING ready to go out, Mister Bridger?" politely asked Lander as Bridger shot him a sharp glance and nodded curtly.

"Lander of the A. F. C.? I remember you. Your people would mighty well like to put a snag in my way."

"I wouldn't. I always wish you luck," was the honest reply.

Bridger smiled good-naturedly.

"Then I don't mind saying we're gitting away almost at once. An' a young, strapping feller like you oughter be doing something better'n sticking round this place an' standing behind a counter. Why don't you git Parker to send you up-country where you can show your mettle?"

Lander was almost inclined to resent the tone and question, for Bridger was only twenty-seven years old and not much his senior. Bridger, however, spoke as a man of vast experience talking to a child.

"I'd mighty well like to see that Yellowstone country you talk about," said Lander.

"Fools round here think I'm making it up," snorted Bridger. "But I've seen all I've told about. Hot water spouting seventy feet high. Springs of water so hot you can cook meat in 'em. An' a cave where the Injuns git their vermilion."

Lander believed he was evening up the mountaineer's air of superiority, and he solemnly repeated—

"I'd mighty well like to see those sights."

"You never will by sticking round here."

And with a jerk of his head the discoverer of Bridger's Pass, of South Pass and the Great Salt Lake, passed on his way.

Lander resumed his smile, then upbraided himself. He never would possess the wealth at twenty-seven that Bridger did. And no number of years could bring him Bridger's influence and power. The man might tell some whopping big lies about the Yellowstone country, but the fact remained that he had more intimate knowledge about the Rocky Mountains than any man of his day. As a guide and reader of signs he was superb. He was held in high esteem by the Indians. Best of all he had worked up from extreme poverty. All St. Louis knew how he and his sister were left orphans when he was but ten years old, and how at that tender age he had bought a ferryboat and supported the two.

"If he wanted to marry a girl like Susette I reckon Hurry-Up Parker would feel mighty proud," gloomily concluded Lander.

Then he became objective and hastily studied the big storehouse. He was late and Hurry-Up Parker would never forgive tardiness. But from what Susette had said the evening before he knew Parker was entertaining the Fort Union bourgeois, and this would mean an all-night affair with many drinks. Therefore Parker would not show up until late afternoon.

He sidled up to the big doorway and ducked in. The first man he saw was Parker, his face screwed up most savagely. Lander wondered how so vicious-looking a man could be the father of the perfect Susette. He felt deeply embarrassed and not a little uneasy as Parker continued glaring at him over a bale of goods.

Hurrying to the end of the store, where lay his tasks, he met Malcom Phinny, a heavily built, dark-faced fellow, handsome in an Indian sort of a way and several years his senior. Phinny had worked a season at Cabanne's Post and had brought down the trade of the Pawnees on the Loup Fork of the Platte. He was working for promotion and was scheduled to get it this season. He gave himself airs accordingly and, having witnessed Lander's tardy arrival and the boss' irritation, he took pains to raise his voice to inform—

"Didn't know as you'd be here, Lander, so I finished sorting out the beads and small stuff for you."

"Thanks for nothing," growled Lander.

"What did you do to make a night of it?" chuckled Phinny.

"Oh, shut up!"

Phinny's dark face flushed although he continued to smile.

"I beg your pardon. I should not question my betters. After the wedding and after you've been taken in partner, I hope you'll find room for me somewhere."

Lander turned in fury, then rocked back on his heels to find himself confronting Parker. The latter's unexpected appearance from behind a pile of blankets also had a strong effect on Phinny, who glided toward the other end of the store.

"What did he mean about weddings and being partner?" demanded Parker, his eyes two black streaks between his lowered lids.

"Lord, sir! *I* don't know. Just some of his beastly nonsense," replied Lander.

"But if nonsense why should it make you mad? You planning to get married?"

"Good land—no, sir! That is—I'm in no position to get married."

"I should say not! You were up to my house yesterday?"

"I—I was so bold as to drop in during the evening," faltered Lander.

"You were so bold, eh? Remember this—don't be so bold again. When I want you there I'll make an errand and send some one else. You remember you're nothing but a —— scrub of hired help, an *engagé*, a man who does the odds and ends. Out of hours your range is down on the water-front until you've shown you've got some guts. You come swelling in here half an hour late as if you was one of the company. That won't go with Hurry-Up Parker again. Now git your nose to your work and keep it there."

He was Susette's father. Lander believed Susette loved him. And her father could talk to him like this! He turned red, then white, and assailed his task to keep his thoughts from murder. He could feel Parker's hard eyes boring into the nape of his neck. It seemed as if he worked an hour with the boss' gaze malignantly following his every move.

At last he heard Parker's steps receding. He twisted his head and caught a glimpse of Phinny, half doubled with merriment behind a pyramid of whisky casks. Lander's heart ached with hate of the man. Parker had some excuse—he had been drinking all night and he was the father of of the incomparable Susette. It was his nasty way to be always nagging the men. He gloried in his nickname. But Phinny was free to be

hated. He was ever trying to lift himself by stepping on the necks of his mates. Many of the men were convinced he carried tales to Parker.

"What made him think I was up at the house last evening?" Lander asked himself as he slowed up his work and rested a hand on a trade-ax and was tempted to hurl it at the grinning face. "Phinny knew somehow that I was there and he let it drop this morning. —— him! He's got all the ways of a Red River half-breed."

FOR the rest of the morning Phinny kept out of his way. When it was near the noon hour Lander saw the men near the door bustling to one side, bowing and scraping in an extravagant manner. Twice before Susette had come to the store, and her arrival had been greeted by just such clumsy attempts to do homage to the pretty daughter of a domineering boss. Ordinarily Lander would have marked it a red-letter day and been filled with joy; now he glanced uneasily toward the door marked "Office" and prayed Parker might not emerge.

Then came a flutter of youth and beauty and Miss Susette was standing inside the door, her skirts pulled aside to escape contamination from a small mountain of whisky casks destined to be smuggled by Fort Leavenworth for the Sioux and Assiniboin trade. Lander hoped she would pass into the office.

She spied him and with a little cry of discovery came tripping down the lane formed by the heaped-up trade goods and supplies.

"Why didn't you come to help me in?" she sternly rebuked. "Two of the men had to lift me up."

"Not a hard job for one man," he said, grinning ruefully at her slight, dainty figure and again marveling how the old bear could be her father. "If you want to see your father he is in the office."

"I don't want to see him," she coolly informed. "I saw him this morning and he was very cross. Can't you come outside where we can talk? This place smells so of things."

"Susette, I don't dare budge. I was late. Your father mounted me like a wildcat. I can't even talk in here. If you'll walk down by Tradeau's house at eight o'clock this evening I'll have much to tell you."

"Walk by Jean Tradeau's house?" she repeated, much puzzled. "Why not see me at my house?"

"I'll tell you this evening."

"But tell me now!" And a maternal glitter quickened her gaze.

"It's like this——"

He halted and cast an apprehensive glance over his shoulder. Phinny's voice was loudly informing:

"She was here just a minute ago, Mister Parker. I thought she was right behind me when I announced her. Now she's gone. No, there she is chatting with Lander."

Lander felt his heart slipping. To get the best of physical fear was easy enough; one had only to buckle down and come to grips with the cause. But the anticipation of being put to shame before the girl and by her father fairly sickened him. Susette, not understanding in the least, was rather provoked that her father should intrude on the scene. She affected not to see him.

Parker bore down upon them and unceremoniously seized the girl by the arm and without a word led her to the door.

"But, papa, I was talking with Mr. Lander," she indignantly protested.

Ignoring her Parker called out to a servant and a frightened colored woman bobbed her head in the door, her lips broadly smiling, her eyes wide with fear.

"You, Maime," hoarsely growled Parker. "If your mistress ever comes here again without my telling her to come I'll sell you down-river."

With that he lifted the vision in lace and ribbons down from the high door and turned back to speak with Lander.

Lander had suffered the worst and now stared at his employer sullenly. Parker halted a few feet from him and began:

"So it's true, eh? I couldn't believe it at first. You're chasing my little gal, eh? I thought it was a lie when he told me——"

"Meaning when that puppy of a Phinny told you," hotly broke in Lander. "I haven't chased your girl. I've known Miss Susette ever since I came to work here two years ago. You've sent me to the house every few days. You knew we met and talked."

"—— your hide! You won't call again. Now git out of here. You're through. You're not only through but the A. F. C. will see you don't git any work in St. Louis, except it's nigger's work on the levee."

"The A. F. C. may stop me getting work, perhaps. I won't call at your house till you ask me," replied Lander, slipping on his coat and picking up his hat.

"I'll ask you to call when the Missouri flows from the Mississip' into the Rocky Mountains. Git your pay at the office now. I don't want you coming in here again."

"God forbid!" exclaimed Lander, hastening blindly into the office.

WHEN his mind cleared Lander found himself down by the old Chouteau Pond. From the time he left Parker he could remember nothing of having procured his pay although he found it in his pocket and right to a penny. He had no recollection of where he had walked or by what route he had come to the pond. He could recall but one thing, and that was Phinny's hoarse bleat of derision as he left the storehouse.

"I have made the breath come hard trying to catch you," spoke up a gentle voice at his elbow.

He turned and his face lighted as he beheld the frail figure of a man with snow-white hair and white mustaches. It was Étienne Clair, an old and very eccentric Frenchman who roomed near him on upper Market Street.

"I'm in a devil of a mess, Papa Clair," he groaned, feeling as free to crave sympathy as if the ancient had been a woman.

"I followed you many streets. I thought you mad. The devil's to pay? Then there must be work for the knife. We will fix it together!" cried Clair, speaking his English with scarcely a trace of accent. "I have lived long on the river and at the foot of the river. I have seen many troubles eased with the knife. But never have I been so glad——"

"The knife will hardly do in this case," morosely broke in Lander.

"Not do?" squealed the Frenchman, his arms and hands violently repudiating such heresy. "Have I not taught you the etiquette of the knife? Is there a young blood in St. Louis, in New Orleans, who knows it better? And behold, you say it will not do!"

"Papa Clair, your heart is as white as your hair. I've quit the A. F. C. Made to quit——"

"Good!"

"Hurry-Up Parker discharged me without a second's notice."

"Descendant of a pig! He shall be insulted by you and challenge you. I will appear for you. Weapons? Knives. He is not so old he can hide behind his age and refuse to meet you."

"Impossible! Even if I wanted to fight him I couldn't."

"Holy blue! I—I do not understand, *m'sieu* Lander. I, Étienne Clair, walk in darkness, *m'sieu*. I have taught you the knife. I have made for it the scabbard for you to wear inside your boot. Knowing what I have taught you, wearing the blade I gave you, you can look the devil in the face and tell him to go home or have his tail cut off. And behold! You say you can not demand your satisfy from a low-down Indian-trader. God's mercy! *M'sieu* Lander, if you can not explain——"

"You don't understand!" choked Lander. "The girl, his girl—Susette. But I mustn't mention names."

"Now God is good! It is unsaid. No name has been spoken!" cried the little Frenchman, sweeping off his shabby fur cap and bowing low to some imaginary princess. "Your high heart does you great honor. Your knife will sing the sweeter when we find honest work for it to do. The divinity of woman must always protect her men from her lover.

"There are three things I must do at once," mumbled Lander. "I must get work. Parker says the A. F. C. will stop me getting work in St. Louis unless I work on the levee."

"His father was a liar! There is always much work for honest men. Go on."

"I must settle my score with Phinny. He has told tales and set Parker against me."

"Surely he shall be paid. The third?"

"I must see—I mention no names."

"Of course. Étienne Clair understands." And again the low bow till the cap brushed the dirt. "It is delicate, eh? Now a message. Behold, I can carry a message with eyes that turn in and see nothing, with a tongue to bring an answer which my ears do not hear."

"I have arranged for meeting her unless she is kept in the house."

"She shall not be kept in. I will enter from the rear and release her and——"

"No, no! I believe she will meet me. The

hour is early as it was fixed before I knew what was to happen to me. I shall walk by the scholar Tradeau's house on Pine Street at eight o'clock."

"Most good! Then this scoundrel Phinny? You can look for work tomorrow but you should look for him tonight."

"I must find him tonight if I would sleep tonight."

"Brave spirit! I will go with you when you seek him."

Lander pondered for a moment, then said:

"Be in Tilton's drinking-place at nine. Wait for me until ten. He goes there. I've heard him speak of the place often."

"A vile place. Scum and cut-throats. I will wait for you."

They separated and Lander returned to his room to brood and rage until the soft twilight hour was come.

He dressed in his best but looked forlorn for a lover as he made for the door and halted to stare at a plain leather scabbard on the wall. He slowly took it down. It was made to go inside his boot, and from it he drew the Frenchman's gift knife, a wonderfully effective weapon in the hands of a master. It was ground to a razor's edge, with a weight and solidity of haft and a length of blade that satisfied all exactions made upon it. It was a queer thing for a lover to take to his tryst, yet he pulled up his trousers leg and slipped the scabbard inside his boot.

His act was partly prompted by his affection for Papa Clair. He knew he was facing a crisis, and somehow it strengthened him to have with him a token from one he loved. Papa Clair had a superstitious regard for his knives. Lander had known him for two years and perhaps had absorbed some of his fancies. The old man had made him master of the knife; only there was none in all St. Louis outside the teacher who suspected the fact.

CHAPTER II

AT TILTON'S PLACE

TURNING in from Main to Pine Street Lander loitered along until he reached a position under some garden bushes which rose high above a fence and afforded a deep splotch of shadow. Two houses below was the home of Jean Baptiste Tradeau who tutored the youth of St. Louis. The lover's gaze was directed through the dusk over the way he had come, for the Parker home was beyond the intersection of Main Street, and it lacked fully fifteen minutes of the hour.

When he halted by the bushes he had the street to himself but now he heard steps and the low murmur of voices from the direction of the Tradeau house. He gave these sounds no attention, as he was now glimpsing a slim, erect figure gowned in white, passing through the shaft of light of a window up the street. His heart began beating rapidly for he knew Susette would be at his side in another minute, and he tried to arrange his words for a coherent explanation. She would be deeply grieved and very indignant once she learned what had happened.

Then the steps behind grew louder. Two men were passing him and one of them laughed. Lander all but attracted their attention, for there was no one who laughed like Malcom Phinny.

"It wa'n't any of my business, mebbe, and yet I reckoned it was a bit, seeing as how you're the boss," Phinny was saying, thus establishing the identity of the second figure as that of Hurry-Up Parker. "I'd known for a long time he was shining up to Miss Susette."

"You had? Then why the devil didn't you tell me?" snarled Parker.

Phinny's apologetic answer was lost on Lander as the two were now drawing away from him. He was mightily concerned over what would happen in the next few rods, when the two men must meet the girl. Luck was badly against him. Had he named any other meeting-place there would not have been this interruption.

Slipping along the fence he took after the two men for a bit, then shifted across the walk and stood behind a tree. Susette was now discernible in the gloaming, a little white patch against the gathering darkness. She took the outside of the walk and would have passed her father unrecognized had not Phinny, falling behind his employer a few steps, thrust out his head to peer impudently into her face.

"Why, Miss Susette! Ain't you lost?" he laughingly greeted.

Parker halted and swung on his heel, demanding—

"You out walking alone?"

"Good evening, papa," she pertly responded. "It's perfectly proper to walk alone."

"It's also proper for you to walk with your father. Take my arm."

"But I wanted to go down the street a bit. I've been in the house for hours."

"Can't you get air enough on your own porch?" grumbled Parker.

"That's not exercise."

"Exercise, eh? Very well. Be back by nine. Phinny, you keep my daughter company. There are too many rough characters loose in this town for a young girl to be out alone."

"Yes, sir. Glad to look after Miss Susette," eagerly replied Phinny.

"You needn't put yourself out, Mr. Phinny," shortly spoke up the girl. "If I can't stroll to the end of the street without a guard I'll go back home."

Although accustomed to having her own way with her surly father there were times when he enforced the law and when she knew it would be useless to rebel. Such was the occasion now; and when he commanded "Back home it is then," she dutifully took his arm and skipped along beside him. When they passed through the next shaft of light the disgruntled lover saw she was twisting her head to look in his direction. On the other side of Parker was Phinny, and he too was glancing back.

For a moment he blamed her for not making more of an effort to keep the appointment, then remembered she knew nothing of his encounter with her father. She would console herself with thinking that the morrow would see him at the house.

"And I can't go to her," he groaned, moving slowly away toward Third Street. "After all, I reckon I'll have to send Papa Clair with a note. That's it. He shall take a note and she can meet me somewhere. But —— that Phinny! One would think he was a member of the family."

AN HOUR later Lander was at the Washington Avenue store of Sublette and Company, or the Rocky Mountain Fur Company, which was to give the American Fur Company the strongest opposition it had ever contended against. Ordinarily the store would have been closed, but Lander hoped the work of getting up the new equipment for the expedition about to start for the mountains would necessitate its being kept open. Nor was he disappointed, for although the store was dark there was a glimmer of light at one end. Making his way to the office entrance he looked through the window and saw Jim Bridger busily checking up some lists.

"Come in if you have to," rumbled Bridger's voice after Lander had rapped for the second time.

Lander entered. Bridger peered up from his work and greeted—

"What does a A. F. C. man want here at this hour?"

"Work," was the laconic reply.

"Through?"

"Dismissed."

"Why?"

"Hurry-Up Parker."

"He's a good trader, a ripping good river and mountain man. One of the kings of the Missouri. What's his complaint against you?"

"He has a daughter. I—I like her. He doesn't like to have me like her."

Bridger grinned broadly in sympathetic amusement.

"Old man acted rough, eh? They sometimes do unless you marry a Injun squaw. No chance for trouble with them as a feller is never spoken to by, an' mustn't speak to, his father-in-l w.. Everything goes as smooth as a fiddle. But work?"

"Parker said the A. F. C. would see to it I got none in St. Louis."

"It's like the A. F. C. Won't give a man his bread an' butter an' don't 'low to let any one else. They'll have more important things to think about afore the season's over. Now let's see. We're all finished up here. A few weeks ago I could have used you fine. This fussing round with papers makes me nervous, an' I reckon you'd done it quicker'n a wolf can steal meat."

"I've done quite a bit of it. Parker wants to fix it to drive me from town. And you can't use me here?"

"Not now. Mebbe later." And Bridger's voice was very kind. "You see the outfit gits under way tomorrer. Some of the men are at St. Charles with the keelboat. Some are waiting at Lexington for the steamer to fetch up goods an' supplies. Étienne Prevost will take the keelboat as far as Fort Pierre. I shall take the land party through to the yearly rendezvous somewhere on Green River. An' some of

the men are helling round St. Louis tonight an' will be lucky if they ain't left behind. I leave in an hour on my best mule to ride across country to Lexington. So, my young friend, the work down here is all done an' I'm sorry."

"It was only a chance," sighed Lander. "I didn't want to miss the shadow of a chance."

Bridger tugged at his brown hair and eyed Lander thoughtfully. Then he abruptly asked:

"Why don't you take on with a mountain trip? Give you two hundred 'n' ninety dollars for the next year 'n' half—eighteen months—an' such grub as can be found in the Injun country. You're young. Once you git started no knowing how far you'll go."

Lander's eyes glistened and for a moment Bridger believed he was to sign up. Then his gaze fell. The mountain trip was all he would ask for if it were not for leaving Susette behind. At least he could not leave her until he had seen her and had explained things.

"If that offer could hold good for a few days," he began.

"No, sir! Take it or leave it as it stands," cut in Bridger. "We want men who can decide things right off the handle. The outfit starts tomorrer. Those who don't git across country to St. Charles tonight will git left."

"Well, I'm sorry I can't sign on, and I can't start tomorrow. I've several things to attend to. Much obliged for the offer, though."

"That's all right," grunted Bridger, nodding his head and returning to his lists.

Outside the store Lander recalled his appointment with Papa Clair at Tilton's place on the water-front near the foot of Cherry Street. He hurried to the rendezvous inflamed by his desire to find Phinny. In his despair and discouragement he needed something to feed upon; and so long as a successful love seemed dubious he would turn to the positives of hate. He now knew he had hated Phinny for a long time and had subconsciously resented the man's many petty treacheries. With desire for little Susette burgeoning his path he had put hate to one side. Had the path held smooth his ignorement of Phinny would have been permanent. Outraged by Hurry-Up Parker's contemptuous treatment he fished out his grievance against Phinny from its mental pigeonhole and knew it was a matter demanding imperative attention.

He minutely reviewed his career as storeman for the A. F. C. and easily traced the thread of treachery running through Phinny's daily actions. He recalled the innumerable little disagreeable incidents at the beginning of his employment, when he was made to appear awkward and slow-witted when Parker's attention was unnecessarily attracted to his minor faults. Phinny's perseverance in undermining his chances for favorable attention was like the malicous gnawing of the Missouri at its banks. What at the time had impressed him as being purposeless acts of mischief now bobbed to the surface of his recollections as deliberate traps. Phinny had plotted systematically from the beginning against the blind lover.

Lander's new perspective also permitted him to discern quite accurately the time Hurry-Up Parker shifted from his usual gruff attitude to evidences of surly dislike. Phinny was slated for promotion to Cabanne's Post, or Fort Union, on the upper river. Lander was being groomed to take his place in the store. Shortly after this arrangement was tacitly understood by Parker and his two employees, Parker had displayed a new face and the promotion was not spoken of again.

Lander was compelled to admit to himself that his failure to advance might be due in part to his own indifference. He had entered the A. F. C. with a fine mettle to see service above the Yellowstone. He had longed to take his chances with the keelboats fighting their way by the treacherous Aricara villages in the land of the Sioux near the mouth of Grand River. He had dreamed of visiting the Cheyennes at the eastern base of the Black Hills. There were the Mandans and Minnetarees along the Upper Missouri and the Knife to be explored, and the stories of Lewis and Clark to be verified. Between their villages and the Milk and extending far north were the numerous and powerful Assiniboins to be conquered in trade. From the Milk to the sources of the Missouri were the Blackfeet, ferocious in their hatred toward the whites. What better adventuring than the sharp dash into the beaver country! In the valleys of the Yellowstone and the Big Horn were the Crows and their strange liking to have

white men live among them. He eagerly had sought his information from returning traders and trappers. He had absorbed much about the various nations. He had drawn deductions his informants were too lazy mentally to indulge in, such as the probable halting of the fur trade for many years if the nations along the Missouri had not been poor boatmen, seeking the river largely for water and fuel. Had they been like the Eastern Indians, skilful in watercraft, what chance would boats have had prior to the coming of steam? And had the wooden canoe and the flatboat and keelboat been discouraged from penetrating the unknown country would steam have become sufficiently interested to take over the river?

There was no doubt but that he had started in on his work with a fine zeal, and that Parker had seized him as an unusual youngster and had been impressed by his enthusiasm. Then came the curly-headed rattle-pate, and the swish of her dainty skirts had sent all his fine ambitions a-flying.

As he made for Tilton's he confessed there was much room for self-criticism. He had feebly endeavored to criticize himself before but his reproaches were always put to flight by the soothing realization he would see Susette on the morrow. So he had kept at his dead tasks, exchanging his chance to become a mountain man for the sake of her sweet smiles.

THERE was Bridger. He might have been like Bridger, a born topographer, more familiar with the mountain passes and streams than even Kit Carson. Bridger and Carson had trapped together on the Powder River two years back.

One year before, when but twenty-six years old, Bridger with Milton Sublette, Henry Frack and John B. Gervaise, had bought out the old partners of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company. Under Bridger's lead two hundred men had passed through the Big Horn basin, had crossed the Yellowstone, had followed the Missouri to its three forks, then up the Jefferson to the Divide and on to the Great Salt Lake. Twelve hundred miles before they returned to Winter on the Powder.

"And all I've done is to wear out a path between goods and supplies in the store," groaned Lander. "Bridger, not much older'n I am, can travel all over the continent; and I can't make a trail to Pine Street."

Lander was honest enough not to blame Phinny for those shortcomings which love was responsible for.

"But, —— him! He might 'a' let me alone. He could 'a' seen I was slipping back in the old man's good-will without giving me the sly kicks he did to make me slip faster."

What would Jim Bridger have done had Phinny plotted against *him?* He would have made him "chaw dirt." No doubt about that. But Hurry-Up Parker would never discourage Jim Bridger if he came wooing Susette. Old Parker would have welcomed him with both hands, brought out a bottle and insisted on making a night of it, and would have concluded the bout with urging his son-in-law to take a large part in the affairs of the A. F. C.

All St. Louis knew—and this meant all the fur-trading world—that Bridger was a thorn to the A. F. C. and would give the powerful organization a mighty hard fight this season. Already he had aroused the A. F. C. to a point where it admitted his mettle by sending men to dog him over the country and to compete with him once he had led the way to choice beaver regions. Bridger had been recognized as a menace. He was asked into the city office for drinks and cigars. Lander, the clerk, was ignominiously driven from the premises.

"I'll even up with Phinny, then get work," concluded Lander as he neared Tilton's. "I'd gone with Bridger in a minute if he wasn't in such a hurry to get started."

A squeaking fiddle and a rough chorus focused his mind on the job ahead of him. Throwing open the door he stepped through and to one side and leaned against the wall while he got his bearings, for the place was foggy with tobacco smoke. The usual rough-scuff of river loungers were draped over the long bar. In the corners and along the sides of the big room were a dozen mountain men, sleeping off their last spree before returning to fight the Blackfeet.

Keelboat men who would stick to the river, who preferred cordelling their long crafts the thousand odd miles to seeking fortune in the mountains, were uproariously drunk and dancing in the middle of the floor. Some were French Canadians, others

—and these were more favored by traders—were St. Louis creoles. Both types were light-hearted and irresponsible. They were capable of carrying a thousand-foot tow-line the full length of the Missouri, forcing their way through all natural obstacles, but of not much account when the Indians rode along the shores and enfiladed them with arrows and balls and invited them to come up and make a real fight. When it came to battle it was the long-haired and bewhiskered trapper, who would rather walk from St. Louis to the Rockies than to carry a tow-line a day's journey, who would quit his yarning and smoking and gambling to swarm up the bank and debate the matter.

In addition to these well-known specimens of the frontier town there were strangers, easily classified but not to be included in the lists of useful occupations. These were less boisterous than the drunken boatmen, less sleepy and indifferent than the mountain men. They drank with their backs to the wall and out of range of windows. Even when swallowing their fiery potations they did not close the eye or roll it to the ceiling in mute testimony to the liquor's potency. They tipped the glass rather than the head and maintained a level gaze on the door, and ceased swallowing until they had settled the status of each newcomer. These were the derelicts from beyond the Mississippi, fleeing the noose, creatures with blood on their souls and who needed only the opportunity to augment their sins by further killings. It was the influx of these desperadoes that gave St. Louis a name for lawlessness.

Lander swept the murky room and met the challenging stare of a dozen suspicious eyes, then started down the bar, the white head of Papa Clair having caught his eye. The old man flung up a hand and beckoned to him briskly. The lawbreakers noted the gesture of welcome and returned to their drink.

Papa was on a bench in the corner near a table. At the table, but not of his company, were four men who were neither traders, trappers, nor river men. Their secrecy in conversing, the failure of the strong liquor to loosen their tongues, the garnishment of pistols and long knife in the belt of each, and—this as indicative as all else—the timidity and deference of the mulatto serving their table, tagged them as superlative fugitives from Eastern justice, most excellent fellows to keep away from.

IN HIS haste to join his friend fenced off in the corner Lander's foot struck against the chair at the end of the table, causing the occupant's hand to spill his liquor. His friends laughed jeeringly. With a vile outcry, without bothering to draw a weapon from his bristling belt, the man sprang to his feet and swung the bottle of liquor above his head. Lander stood as stupefied, his wits paralyzed, and he would have been brained if it had not been for the glittering streak over the table.

With a roar of pain the man dropped the bottle and stared aghast at the riven forearm. Lightly as a cat old Papa Clair came swarming over the table, a second blade clutched by the haft, and with a yank that sent the desperado reeling into his chair with sickness he recovered his knife, softly crying:

"It is mine. Please!"

"Lawful heart, but he's done gone an' throwed a knife through Buck's arm!" howled one of the four; and he came to his feet, his hand fumbling at his belt.

The others pushed back their chairs, but before they could rise Papa Clair's left hand poised a knife by the tip, the other held for a thrust in his right hand. Lander came to his senses and whipped out his blade from his boot. Papa Clair jolted him to the rear with an elbow and, mincing aside a few steps to confront the man on his feet, he purred:

"Ah, *m'sieu* knows the knife. See and behold! I drop my hand. I take the knife by the handle. I will not move till *m'sieu* lifts his blade and is ready to throw."

A river-rat squirmed up to the table and whispered hoarsely in the desperado's ear. With a sickly grimace the man placed both hands on the table. His friends glared at him in wonderment. He explained:

"Devil Clair. Go down to the Gulf an' ask 'bout him in th' old days. If any on ye wants to pick up this trouble an' carry a fight to him, ye're welcome to my chance. I quits. I've seen a 'gator chaw up a puppy. There ain't a bit o' fight left in my whole natur'." Then to Papa Clair and with a side nod toward the wounded man, "Ye got through with Hepsy?"

Papa Clair was grieved and replacing

one knife tugged at his long white mustache regretfully.

"No spirit," he sighed to Lander. "When I was young— Such a long, well-lighted room, with plenty of room for the people to line up and enjoy it. . . . He speaks of the Gulf. Ah, those were days! Descendant of pig-devils, stick out your arm."

This to the groaning wounded man. The man timidly obeyed. Papa Clair examined the wound and proudly proclaimed to the staring, silent patrons of the place:

"Through the flesh! The bone is barely touched. As pretty a cast as I ever made. Wash it with whisky and if there isn't too much poison in the blood it will heal rapidly. . . . Take *m'sieu* away. He needs quiet and rest. And I need this table."

The last was accompanied by a bristling glance at the wounded man's friends, a baleful glance that hoped to find opposition. The three men rose and led their groaning friend down the room to the door, followed by jeers and laughter from the onlookers. Papa Clair replaced the knife in his boot and said:

"My friend, I have waited long for you. Your man has not been in. Where have you been? What have you done?"

"Failed in everything I tried. Parker came along before I could see my little friend. But I'll see her tomorrow. I found Jim Bridger in the Washington Avenue store and tried to get work with his company. But his outfit starts tomorrow; and of course I couldn't go without seeing the lady. Two failures. If they go in threes it means I shall not see Phinny and settle my score with him tonight."

"It is to be regretted your not seeing your little friend tonight. If you could have explained to her tonight— But there; you didn't know when you went to meet her that you might ask work off Bridger. He is a great man. Not so good with the knife as Jim Baker, yet a great man. I was with him in Cache Valley on Bear River in the Winter of twenty-four. Étienne Prevost had charge of us during our trapping on the Wind and Green that season. We did not agree about the course of the Bear and wagers were made. It was night and Bridger rose and said he would settle the dispute. He left the fire and disappeared. When we saw him again it was when he came back from the Great Salt Lake. He had followed the Bear to the lake. He had found the water salt. He was the first white man to see that body of water. The Spaniards say one of their missionaries, Friar Escalante of Santa Fé, visited the lake in seventeen seventy-five. I believe M'sieu Bridger was the first. And do you know, my friend, we all believed the lake was an arm of the Pacific until the next season when four of our men visited it and explored the shore line in skin-boats and found it had no outlet."

"Bridger's a good mountain man, all right," shortly agreed Lander, his own failures making the other's praise offensive. "But he has his weak spots. All about cooking fish and meat in boiling springs, hot water shooting into the air nearly a hundred feet! If that wasn't enough he insists the hot water spouts at certain times, just so long a time apart. Wonder who keeps watch of it and turns it off and on every so often. Then there's his cave of Indian war-paint. Wonder why any Indians bother to trade robes for our vermilion when they can have it for nothing at any time!"

"That is up in the Crow country. He had a chance to look about up there. He may forget and fill up the chinks with fancies, yet he must have seen something," wistfully defended Papa Clair, his white brows drawn down in bushy bewilderment. "So fine a man can not be a liar. When he told me about pickling enough buffalo in the Great Salt Lake to last a big band of trappers a whole season I could see there was sense to the scheme. But, my friend, I'm sorry he told about the cooking springs. Warm water perhaps; but to catch fish from a stream and throw them over and boil them—name of a pipe! Yet I try to believe him. The pickling of buffalo rang true but—there, there! He is a fine man. Let us not say more about it.'

"Why hasn't some one else seen that wonderful lake, sixty miles long, hemmed in by mountains?" persisted Lander.

Papa shrugged his thin shoulders and with a malicious little grin said:

"I know one way to prove it is, or isn't. If I were younger I should do it by myself. That is to go there and look about. If I were younger— Well, well, Jim Bridger has seen so much that is wonderful he has no need to tell fairy stories. I swallowed his pickled buffalo. Why not? But behold! I feel depressed when he tells of the

cooking-spring. The cave of war-paint. Some one must have left some paint there. But to say it grows—holy blue! Yet he saw something. Perhaps the lake wasn't sixty miles long. Perhaps the water was not scalding hot, just warm. Who knows? And yet when I was very young, even before the Missouris were exterminated, when the Otoes and Kansas tribes were something besides names, I heard strange stories from the up-river country—like fairy-stories. But yet so wonderful a country must have wonderful secrets. Even in the few years left to me and my knives I believe I could uncover some strange things up there. Only the good God knows it all. And if I did they would call me, 'Papa Clair, the old liar.' "

"Not to your face, Papa," warmly declared Lander. "And I haven't thanked you yet for stopping that fellow from braining me. My head was asleep. I saw him lift the bottle over me and it seemed I was dreaming and couldn't move a peg. If some one had touched me, just to start me—but no one did. So, old friend, I owe you a life."

"Take good care of it. Keep it clean for the little friend. Wait!"

HE TURNED and beckoned to a boy and gave an order. The boy brought a bottle of French wine which Papa Clair lovingly decanted, and then proposed:

"To *Her!* We shall see different pictures as we drink; yet it is the same little woman to be found in every land where love is."

They drank standing, the ceremony attracting the attention of those near by. As they were resuming their seats the door opened with a crash, and Malcom Phinny, followed by several men, entered. He flapped his arms and crowed a challenge. River men stirred uneasily, anxious to cut his comb. Old mountain men lazily opened their eyes, sniffed in contempt, and went back to their sleep.

Phinny undoubtedly would have been quickly accomodated with more trouble than he could carry had not Tilton rushed from behind the bar and greeted him effusively, thus branding him as a friend, and one who was protected by the warning, "Hands off."

"Coming man in the A. F. C.," a trader at the table next to Clair's informed his companion, a long-haired free trapper.

"To —— with the A. F. C.," growled the trapper. "He'll be a goin' man if he does any more ki-yi-yiing round here."

Papa Clair reached forward and tapped him lightly on the shoulder and sweetly asked—

"Is it not much better, *m'sieu*, for the old men of the village to correct their young men than for outsiders to take over the task?"

The trapper gave him a belligerent glance, recognized the wrinkled face, and fretfully snarled:

"I don't want none o' yer fight, Étienne Clair. If yer knife is lookin' for meat it can look farther."

Papa sighed despondently and settled back and toyed with his wine. Lander, who was watching Phinny, was scarcely conscious of this little by-play; and as he gazed his eyes glared wickedly. The loss of his position, the warning to keep away from the Pine Street home and Susette, were all attributed to the dark face up the line.

Phinny had been drinking enough to make him reckless. If not for Tilton's public avowal of favor a dozen hands would have pawed at him before he was ten feet inside the door. Again he flapped his arms and crowed. Beyond side glances no attention was paid him this time. Cocking his head insolently he strutted the length of the bar. Papa Clair heard Lander's boots scrape on the rough floor as he drew his feet under him.

Phinny now saw him and his dark eyes glittered vindictively. Taking a position at the end of the bar where he could keep his gaze on Lander, he rolled some coins on the slab and in a loud voice invited—

"Every one drink to my luck in gitting rid of a snake, a two-legged snake, that crawled out of my path and knows better than to return."

"—— him!" hissed Lander, his hand dropping down to his boot and playing with the haft of his knife.

"Softly, softly. It all works out very sweetly," purred Papa Clair, his blue eyes beaming cheerily. "Patience. A well-lighted room, a company worshipful of good entertainment, and fair play in the person of Étienne Clair. But let it come naturally."

The liquor was speedily consumed, and

Phinny, noting the strained expression on Lander's face, made more coins dance on the bar and bawled:

"It's my night. It's been my day. Tomorrow will be my day. Once more with me, and drink hearty. This time to 'S'—the only woman west of the Mississippi."

"Base-born dog!" growled Papa Clair, his white beard bristling.

Lander rose to his feet and picked up his glass. Before he could hurl it Phinny threw his glass, striking Lander on the arm but doing no harm.

"You'll fight, you sneak!" roared Lander.

"Oh, my friend, my friend!" groaned Papa Clair, seizing Lander's arm and preventing him from leaping at his enemy. "Such roughness! Such lack of wit! I am embarrassed!"

"You heard him!" choked Lander, trying to throw off the detaining hand.

"You've played into his hands. You've challenged him," sighed the old man, his long, slim fingers contracting like circlets of steel. "It could have been so pretty. Now it becomes a brawl. . . . But wait! He had no right to throw the glass and make you challenge him. You gave the first affront when you rose to hurl your glass. Hell's devils! Does he think to conduct this like a keelboat fight? I will straighten it out. I will make his friends see it in the true light. He must challenge you, and you shall have choice of weapons."

He rose with a knife held back of his arm and took a step toward Phinny, when Lander swept him behind him, hoarsely objecting:

"No, no. Let it finish as it began." Then to Phinny: "I said you must fight. You have lost your tongue?"

"Yes, I'll fight," gritted Phinny. "Tilton will look after me. I only demand that we fight at once. Here."

"Not here," protested Tilton. "Gentlemen, please be still. I'll look after my friend. I suppose this young cock-a-lorum can scare up a friend."

"*Diable m'emporte!*" ejaculated Papa Clair, gliding forward. "Come! What do you mean? You try to pick a quarrel with an old man. Yes. I appear for M'sieu Lander. Behold, you speak slurringly of me to him. This is very bad. Come!"

Tilton's liquor-flushed face became pallid. Fragments of strange tales concerning Papa Clair's wild youth flocked through the man's mind—wicked old stories of the Gulf, when men made their own laws, whispers of lonely lagoons that were visited only by piratical craft.

"I meant I reckined it might be difficult for him to reach his friends in time to fight at once. No harm was meant. As you represent him s'pose we talk it over. Mebbe we can fix it up without any fighting."

"Then you don't stand for me," cried Phinny, whisky-courageous, and he walked to the upper end of the bar.

"Oh, you shall have your satisfy, young rooster," sneered Papa Clair, in no wise contented with Tilton's evasion of a quarrel.

Tilton waved the crowd back and talked earnestly to Papa who heard him sullenly.

"I agree," shortly said Papa as the saloon-keeper finished. "It is poor sport when so much better could be had for the asking."

With that he returned to Lander, twisting his long mustaches and trembling with anger.

"We are to go over to Bloody Island," he rapped out.

"Good!"

"As the challenged person he chooses pistols. Sacrilege!" snapped Papa.

"I do not care. Let it be pistols. Only let's get to business.

"My friend, be patient. You shall soon face him. It is not because I fear for you with pistols that I grieve. It is because you blundered and played into their hands. When all was so prettily staged for clean knife-play! Bah! Honor is more easily satisfied these days. But there were times when one did not have to wait a year to see the knife-fight. Well, well. Let us get along with it. Perhaps some time we shall deserve better. We go at once. The moon is up. It will be light enough to exchange shots."

CHAPTER III

THE DUEL

IT LACKED an hour of midnight when Jim Bridger locked the Washington Avenue store and walked down to the river-front. He was about to leave the city for another year in the mountains, and there was no guarantee he would ever return

There were many forgotten graves along the Missouri and its tributaries. Bridger meditated calmly on the possible vicissitudes of the season ahead, and knew that for a certain percentage of his mountain men this would be the last trip to the Rockies.

He had halted close to the river and found himself staring through the soft moonlight at Bloody Island. The island, famous as a dueling-ground for the hot spirits of the time, who would not be satisfied with anything short of a rival's blood, always fascinated him. As a boy he knew its history. Often he had wandered over it and paused to rest in the shade of the huge cottonwood which had stood there a sturdy tree long before St. Charles, *Petite Côte*, began life as the first settlement on the Missouri, or two years before St. Louis had its beginning.

Bridger was thirteen years old and supporting himself and his sister with his ferryboat when Thomas H. Benton, "Old Bullion," and Charles Lucas fought two duels on the island, Lucas being killed. Six years later Joshua Barton, a brother of the first United States Senator from Missouri, was killed by Thomas Rector under the cottonwood. And could he have read the future for the period of but four months he would have known that Major Thomas Biddle, paymaster of the United States Army, and Congressman Spencer Pettis were to kill each other, the range being but five feet.

As he was recalling the historic encounters, and many others of lesser notoriety, he was disturbed by the dipping of paddles and the appearance of a long dugout making for the island. His spell vanished and he would have left the levee had he not observed that the canoe was filled with men. The hour, the number of men in the twenty-five footer, told him that only one errand could call them to Bloody Island. He stayed his steps and stared after them curious to witness the finale of the affair. A second canoe shot into the moonlight, but this was smaller than the other and seemed to contain but two men. From the forward canoe a deep voice bawled—

"American Fur ag'in' th' world!"

This sentiment was loudly cheered. Bridger, who was gathering himself to give the autocratic A. F. C. the fight of its life, walked back to the water's edge and frowned thoughtfully as he watched the progress of the second craft.

"There's going to be a fight. First canoe's filled plumb full of A. F. C. men. Them two most likely are Opposition men. They oughter have some one sorter to look after them. I'd hate to be the only stranger on the island in a crowd of A. F. C. men if any blood was to be spilled. I ain't got the time but I reckon I'll drop over an' just see how it works out."

Searching up and down the levee he soon found a small dugout and with an improvised paddle made for the end of the island.

Bridger was now beginning to be recognized as the foremost mountain man of his time. He had been schooled by General Ashley, and had trapped and explored every tributary of the Platte and Yellowstone with such men as Lucien B. Maxwell, Carson, and Jim Baker. He was old in the ways of the plains and mountains before he became one of the heads of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company. He had been present at the attack on the villages of the treacherous Aricaras in the Spring of 1823, the first campaign against trans-Mississippi Indians conducted by a United States army, when Ashley and his veterans joined forces with General Atkinson and his "Missouri Legion." The A. F. C. would gladly buy his services, being especially troubled and incensed because he followed his old chief's example of taking trappers to the mountains without depending upon the good-will of the natives, or on settled trading-posts. The powerful organization was now prepared to fight him at his own game by sending companies of men to dog his steps and compete with him at every turn; and in doing this the A. F. C. admitted his worth as a trader and advertised their fear of him as an opponent.

Bridger this night was on the eve of a battle royal for beaver, but he had no thought except for the fight between unknown men on Bloody Island. The sentiment from the leading canoe, revealing the men were A. F. C. sympathizers, made him keen to follow and see that the minority received fair play. Landing at the nose of the island he pulled up his canoe. Then with a mastery of woodcraft that would have made an Indian jealous he threaded his way toward the opening where the duels were always fought. Before he reached the spot he caught the sound of voices, one

in particular being raised most blatantly.

"That would be Tilton," he muttered. "Owned by the A. F. C. body an' soul, if he happens to have any such thing."

"I'm running this show!" Tilton shouted as Bridger reached the end of the bush growth and stood unobserved in the shadows and watched the moon-lighted scene.

"A thousand pardons, *m'sieu*," remonstrated a soft voice. "But behold, you will run on to my knife if you fail in courtesy to M'sieu Lander."

"The devil! Young Lander, who wanted a job with me!" muttered Bridger. "Wouldn't go to the mountains along of leaving his girl. Now he takes a chance on losing his life—an' all of a pleasant evening. He must have some spirit. Mebbe I misjudged him."

"Mister Phinny, as th' challenged party, has said pistols," began Tilton.

"To be sure. Behold, it is his right," broke in Papa Clair. "But the distance and the positions are not for you to name. We will toss a coin for position, and we will decide between us how far apart they shall stand."

"Oh, let's have it over with," grumbled Lander. "Give me a pistol and stand the skunk before me. If he isn't near enough I'll go after him."

"You'll find me near enough to put a ball through your heart, or my name ain't Malcom Phinny," jeered the other principal.

"Phinny?" mused Bridger. "The same who went to bring down the Pawnee trade to Cabanne's, found them away on a war-path and stole their corn, and made them believe it was our men."

"I reckon they don't want any of our fight," sneered one of Phinny's adherents from the edge of the grove.

"Pardon! Does *m'sieu* want to fight?" politely inquired Papa Clair, running toward the group in the shadows.

"—— ye! Keep that sticker 'way from my ribs!" frantically yelled the man.

"Come back here, Papa. This is growing into a joke. That swarthy dog doesn't want to fight. Hurry or they'll be swimming back to the city," called out Lander.

"My man will fight at fifteen paces," snarled Tilton.

"Very well. It is most excellent to find he will fight at all," said Papa Clair. "If one stands where M'sieu Tilton is standing, and one here in my tracks, the light will be equal and M'sieu Tilton can place his man without tossing the coin."

"Not by a —— sight!" growled Tilton. Then with a vicious laugh: "This is for blood. Keep yer —— Frenchy perliteness to yerself. We'll toss a coin. Th' winner picks any spot in the openin' he wants to an' t'other man must face him. Hi, Dillings! Step out here an' flip a coin."

Bridger gave a low, amused laugh at the bald-faced plan to do murder. Papa Clair spat with a hissing noise and ominously objected:

"Be careful, M'sieu Tilton. Be very careful. Not M'sieu Dillings. He has the prejudice. He has said he did not believe my man wanted the fight. We do not trust him. No."

"Well, I can't toss it; neither can ye toss it; neither can Phinny nor Lander. Name any one ye want to," affably replied Tilton.

"But you all are of the same," protested Clair. "Let them stand as I said with the light fair for both."

"Ye keep on backin' water an' there won't be enough light to fight by," warned a voice from the shadows.

"We know our rights. Ye ain't new to this game, Papa Clair," gravely said Tilton. "I insist on th' coin bein' flipped. Name any man on this island; we'll be satisfied an' never make a yip; only be quick."

"You know well we have no friends he e," replied Clair savagely. "You bring a crowd of men. We two are here alone."

"And only one of you is going back," taunted Phinny.

"Dog! Defiler of the sacred dueling-ground! *Nom de Dieu!* It is more the murder trap!" shrilly cried Clair.

"Name some one or Dillings shall toss th' coin," peremptorily announced Tilton.

"Wouldn't that be pretty raw, Tilton?" drawled Bridger, moving from the bushes.

THE deep silence evidenced how greatly his intrusion had jolted the men. Before any one spoke or made a move he advanced into the opening and inquired—

"Will I do, Papa Clair?"

"The devil would do, rather than any of these A. F. C. men," cried Clair. "I can't see you well, *m'sieu*. Your voice is that of some one I have known and liked. You can't be an A. F. C. man. Give your name."

"Jim Bridger. Do I suit?"

"To the sky and ground!" enthusiastically exclaimed Lander.

"Holy blue! Better than an angel!" cried Papa Clair.

"Hold on a minute!" yelled Tilton, still nonplused but realizing he must say something. "I reckin it ain't just reg'lar for a outsider to come crowding like this. How many yer men hiding back there?"

"Never you mind my men, you 'Ricaree-hearted skunk. You and your rotten crowd won't be hurt if you don't try any dirty work. All ready? Here goes." The coin glittered in the moonlight. Phinny called out anxiously.

"You lost," announced Bridger.

"How do we know that?" cried Tilton.

Bridger stood beside him in two strides. The spectators could not see just what took place, but all could hear Bridger say:

"You heard me say that your man lost the call. What do you mean by your words? You making off to throw a doubt 'bout my honesty? Quick!"

"No, no, Mister Bridger. I spoke afore I thought," gasped Tilton.

"Some time some one will git fussed up an' you won't have time to think," somberly warned Bridger. "Lander, choose your position. You can stand and face anywhere you will."

According to Tilton's own terms Lander could have selected a position in the shadows of the bushes and compelled his man to stand in the bright moonlight. Tilton expected him to take the advantage, especially when Papa Clair repeated Tilton's words, "This is for blood." Lander hesitated a moment, not that he purposed seeking any undue advantage but solely to make Phinny and his followers squirm.

"Don't sweat any more, Phinny," he called out. "I will stand here, facing Tilton. Measure the ground."

"An' I'll stand over here near my old friends, Dillings an' others, all good A. F. C. men," chuckled Bridger, crossing to the sullen group.

"Ah, now we shall have a decent fight. Only with the knife it would be much cleaner. If *m'sieu* even now wishes to change and fight with the knife my man will not object. But of course not at the present distance."

"No, no," snarled Phinny, taking a pistol from Tilton and gripping it nervously.

Tilton stepped off the distance, Papa Clair mincing along at his side to see he did not make it more than fifteen paces.

"Stand here, Phinny," Tilton gruffly called. "Shall I give the word, Clair?"

"My friend, M'sieu Bridger, is better to give the word. No one objects?"

Tilton bit his lips but did not object. Bridger was to be reckoned with in more ways than one. In a physical contest there was no one between the Missouri and the Rockies who could make him hold back from trouble. He was one who never forgot a friend or an injury. His powerful personality, despite his lack of mature years, already was registering on St. Louis. He typed the ideals of the fur trade that existed long before the A. F. C. made its headquarters in St. Louis in 1822.

"I'm willin'. It's only a matter o' countin'," sullenly replied Tilton.

"Ah, men count, and men count," ironically murmured Clair. "If M'sieu Bridger has the great politeness to favor us."

Bridger strode to a position midway between the two men, halting just out of line of their fire, and humorously remarked:

"I didn't come for the job. But if you all say I must, why, I must."

Suddenly wheeling to face the men lined up along the bushes he hooked his fingers in his belt and there was no humor now in his voice as he warned—

"I'll kill any man or men who break in on this game." Then to the duelists: "I shall slowly count three. After the word three you can fire."

"And I hold my knife by the tip. My eyes are watching M'sieu Tilton," added Papa Clair.

"—— yer s'picions!" growled Tilton, edging away from his principal. "Give the word an' let's have it over with."

"Make ready. Are you both ready?" called out Bridger sharply.

"Ready here," snarled Phinny.

"Ready," quietly called out Lander.

"One—two—three," slowly and distinctly counted Bridger.

Phinny fired while the last word was being uttered, his ball whistling by Lander's ear. An instant later Lander fired, and his opponent half turned, remained motionless for a moment, then slumped down on his knees and rolled over.

Bridger started toward him, wrathfully crying—

"The miserable cur, to fire before he got the word!"

Tilton reached the prostrate figure first and tore open his shirt, and cried out—

"Plumb through th' heart!"

Bridger came to a halt. All the others stood like stumps for a count of five. Then Dillings' voice croaked:

"——'s to pay for this. Can't kill a A. F. C. man like that!"

With a harsh laugh of triumph Papa Clair jeered:

"*M'sieu* is much in the mistake. The A. F. C. men can be killed just like that."

There was an uneasy stirring by the bushes, and the metallic click of a pistol being cocked brought Bridger's hands from his belt, holding two pistols; and he warned:

"A fair fight on Lander's part. A try at murder on Phinny's part. Had he killed Lander I should have killed him for firing before the word was given. All stay where you are till we're afloat, or more'n one corpse will be toted from this place."

"If any one is grieved and wishes to settle a point of honor with me, I will remain. I, Étienne Clair, an old man," began Papa.

But Bridger cut him short by fairly taking him under his arm and disappearing among the bushes with Lander at his side.

"You two take your canoe an' paddle to the foot of the island. I've got a canoe there an' will join you in a few minutes."

They jumped into their dugout and shot the craft down-stream. Bridger remained in the narrow path, over which so many vindicators of honor had traveled, and waited. From the opening came a confused murmuring of many voices. Then some one passionately cried out:

"Is three men to git away like that? It's light 'nough to pick 'em off in th' canoe. Come on!"

There was a rush of feet, a floundering about in the narrow path, then a precipitate halt as Bridger coldly warned:

"Stand back. A bullet for the next man who comes another step."

"Jim Bridger!" ejaculated one of the men.

"An' he's waiting to see who'll be first to enter his butcher-shop," was the grim reply.

"We want to take Phinny across," called out Tilton.

"No hurry in his case. Stick where you are for a few minutes."

With this warning Bridger noiselessly slipped into cover and swiftly retreated to the shore and peered down-stream. The dugout was not in sight. He waited a couple of minutes for good measure, and then announced:

"I'll count twenty, slow-like, then the path is open."

The men waited for him to commence counting. But he had ducked into the bushes and was following the path which skirted the shore, and soon came to where he had left his canoe. Holding their dugout stationary by grasping some overhanging branches Papa Clair and Lander were waiting for him. Pushing off his canoe and leaping in he softly cautioned:

"Git work out of your paddles. They're skunks, but there's a full dozen of 'em; an' a bullet from a coward's gun might kill the bravest man that ever lived."

HE LED the way and it was not until they were nearing the levee that they discerned the other dugout slowly making the crossing. As they landed and hurriedly walked up the levee Bridger said:

"The man Dillings 'lowed —— was to pay. I reckon he was right so far as our young friend is mixed in it, Papa."

"It was a fair fight. No one can bother him," said Clair.

"He won't be bothered by the law but he'll be a marked man so long as that band of wolves feels fretted over tonight's work. Some day he'll turn up missing. Mebbe not tomorrer or next day, but soon. He must quit town for a spell if he wants to keep on living."

"I must see some one before I quit town," said Lander, his mind in a whirl.

"All right. You oughter know your own business best. But the chances is you'll never grow up an' die an' leave her a widder. But that's your game."

"M'sieu Bridger is right as he always is right," sighed Papa Clair. "If they had fought with knives no one would make trouble. If those who want to pick up the quarrel would come out in the open like men you should stay and meet them one by one, always choosing knives, as you would be the challenged party. But a shot in the dark, a knife-thrust while you

sleep! Bah, the savages! My young friend, you must leave St. Louis."

"He must go tonight," added Bridger.

"Go? Where to?" asked Lander.

"Up or down the river," retorted the old man.

"With no work ahead of him an' probably without much money," mused Bridger. "No; that won't do. They could trail him easy an' find the killing better down-river than right here in St. Louis. This is the best way; go across country an' make St. Charles by morning. Some of my men are there, waiting for the rest of the band to join 'em. Étienne Prevost is there with a keelboat. He'll take the boat up to Lexington an' some of the men will keep abreast of him with the mules. The mules are for the band at Lexington who are to go overland while Prevost takes the boat on up to Fort Pierre. You can go on the keelboat from St. Charles to Lexington, or you can stick along with the men driving the mules. By the time you reach Lexington you'll have made up your mind whether you'll stick to the boat an' go to Fort Pierre, or make straight for the mountains with the land party. I shall ride 'cross-country an' join or catch up with the land party at Lexington. Once in the mountains all the A. F. C. influence this side of —— can't make you budge, but mebbe a Injun will dance your sculp."

"If I must go, I must," sighed Lander. "I'll start at once, but I must write a letter first—and get it delivered."

"I'll act for you, my friend," promptly offered Papa Clair. "Holy blue! What is to become of me after you are gone? No more evening lessons. . . . Yet behold, you know about all I can teach. No more evening walks down by Chouteau's old grist-mill. I have lived my day."

"I'll be back inside of two years if I'm lucky," lugubriously consoled Lander.

"Too much talk," snapped Bridger. "That gang has landed. No knowing when they may strike your trail. Git about your letter-writing. Pretty soon they may be combing the city for you. I'll hitch a mule back of my store. I'm off at once to make Lexington. You can make St. Charles by morning easy. Don't stop to git any outfit. Just take your gun an' ride like the devil. Prevost will outfit you. Tell him I sent you—that I'm on my way to Lexington."

"Would Tilton dare to attack me here in the city? Isn't there any law in St. Louis? Or can the friends of the A. F. C. do just as they want to?" demanded Lander, beginning to grow wrathy at the prospects of enforced flight.

"Oh, Tilton isn't anybody's fool," assured Bridger. "He won't appear in what happens in St. Louis. But there's a choice collection of murderers an' robbers hanging around his saloon who'll do any dirty work for a prime beaverskin. If they slip up on the job Tilton won't be dragged in. He'll just send out another gang after you."

They parted, Bridger going to procure a mule for the fugitive, the latter and Papa Clair hurrying to the Market Street room. Here Lander wrote a long letter, explaining his plight and vowing his undying love, and pleading for Miss Susette to wait for him. While he wrote Papa Clair laid out his rifle and trappings. With a long-drawn sigh Lander finished, sanded and sealed the missive and handed it to Papa Clair, and was asking his friend how he proposed to deliver it unsuspected by Hurry-Up Parker, when the old man stuffed the letter inside his coat, clutched Lander by the arm and with his free hand extinguished the light.

"The devil!" faintly ejaculated Lander, rubbing his eyes in the darkness.

"No, men. On the stairs," softly whispered Papa.

"Tilton?" whispered Lander, fumbling round and securing his rifle and slipping on his belt, powder-horn and other hunting accouterments.

"No such luck. Men sent by him. Men he will wash his hands of if they blunder. They're working for blood-money. Stand here with me behind the door."

They leaned against the wall and listened. Till now Lander had heard nothing. With his ear to the wall he fancied he caught the sound of soft footsteps stealing to the door. Papa Clair caught him by the ear and dragged down his head and murmured:

"There are twelve or more—only six apiece. I hear some still coming up the stairs. When they come in keep behind me. We must get into the hall and put out the light."

"We can go down the back way."

"Much better. I see your head is clear. They will be sure to have men posted at the bottom of the front stairs. Now be ready."

AN AUDIBLE shuffling outside the door heralded the coming attack. There followed a few seconds of silence; then Lander jumped spasmodically as a volley of heavy balls riddled the panels of the door, smashed in the wall beyond and shattered the window. With the discharge of firearms there came a rush of heavy bodies against the none-too-strong door, and in swept the mob of professional killers. The one light in the hall burned dimly and was at the top of the stairs some twenty feet away. It barely dispelled the thick gloom of the room.

The first two men in were now at the bed, stabbing furiously. One man wheeled and blundered into the couple crouching behind the door waiting for a chance to dart into the hall. The blunderer screamed and fell writhing to the floor. Papa Clair dived into the group, horribly active and efficient. Lander with his rifle in one hand and knife in the other kept behind him.

Instantly the room was choked with yells and curses. Blows were showered on the two at random, and Lander's upraised rifle proved an excellent buckler. Some of the blows, blindly bestowed, fell on the intruders. Pistols were discharged at close range, but the darkness of the room prevented accuracy of execution.

Neither Clair nor Lander had time to distinguish individuals. With their eyes more accustomed to the darkness they made out a frantic mass of milling men, and thrust their knives at random where they found their way blocked by the surging bodies.

"To the door!" yelled Lander to recall Papa Clair from his Berserk rage.

The old man remembered their purpose was to escape and shifted his advance, swinging his knife in an arc before him and leaving it for his pupil to guard the flanks. When first precipitated into the conflict Lander was heart-sick at the thought of bloodshed. Now he was committed to it, once he had heard the grunts of the two stabbing the empty bed, he knew only one sensation, to hack his way clear of the beasts who for a few pieces of silver had come to murder an inoffensive stranger.

Cursing and screaming, the hired assassins found their very numbers blocking them. Then one voice rose above the hubbub, yelling:

"That ol' devil of a Clair's here! Look out fer that knife!"

"In your throat!" shrilly cried Papa Clair, and he seemed to straighten out in mid air, his knife-point darting at incredible distance. His traducer went down, choking and coughing.

Lander brought his knife back in a wide slash that sent the crowding assailants reeling back for a moment, and with a rush carried Papa through the door and to the head of the stairs. After them came those still able to walk. With a swing of his rifle he knocked the light to the floor and the hall was in darkness.

Papa turned to renew the fight but, putting up his knife, Lander swept him from his feet and carried him down the hall. The desperadoes took it for granted their quarry had descended the main stairs to the street, and they called for the lookout at the outer door to stop them. As they rushed down the stairs Lander sighed in relief and led the way down the rear stairs.

"Bridger was right," said Lander as they stole through the dark streets. "Tilton and his gang will never be satisfied until they get me."

"The more so, my friend, because M'sieu Bridger appeared in the affair as your champion. Yes, you must go....But life stops for old Papa Clair after you've gone. Yet behold, you should have gone before. The time for wooing is after the long trail has been covered, when your buckskin garments are so worn no one can tell what they are made of. To come back and say: 'I have seen life. I have lived and fought my way among men and savages.' Ah, that is the speech that makes *m'm'selle* very proud. A woman likes to discover things in the man she loves, not to know him as we know the way from here to *Petite Côte*. Her love is like an old mountain man—always hungry for something new."

"Eighteen months!" muttered Lander, more to himself than to Papa Clair.

"The months will pass. Come snow, go snow. What profit could you squeeze out of them if you stayed here and worked in a store?

Life is a bag of months. Fortune is what a man squeezes out of them. To get his satisfy he must squeeze each month very hard. If he can't get love he gets gold. If neither love nor gold he can at least get red-blooded life. Fortune may play tricks with him. *M'm'selle* may turn from him, but

life—real and burning—can always be his."

"Yes, yes; of course," mumbled Lander, in a poor mood for the comforts of philosophy. "Now you must leave me. Deliver the letter to Susette in the morning. I must hurry to Bridger's store and get the mule."

"The little lady shall have the letter early in the morning. Do not doubt it. My friend, always wear my knife and scabbard. Do not, unless hard pressed by several, uncover yourself with those wide, slashing movements you used in the room. Keep behind the point, and God bless you."

Instead of taking Lander's outstretched hand he seized him by the shoulders and kissed him on both cheeks.

Lander almost winced in his surprize, then remembered the Frenchman's emotional nature, also his ferocity as a fighting man, and for the first time during the day found himself thinking of some one besides himself and Susette. The slight, frail figure and the snowy hair contrasted vividly with the indomitable will and high heart. He realized he had been Papa Clair's only intimate, perhaps the only close friend the old man had known for many years.

"Good-by, Papa. God knows I am grateful for all you've done for me. Sometime we'll meet again."

"A year and a half will go quicker for an old man than for youth waiting for his sweetheart. I shall be here, looking for you when the men come back from the mountains. . . . Remember and keep behind the point. I shall think of you much. . . . Only clumsy fools try to see how much blood they can let loose with a knife with their cutting and slashing."

There was more, but he had turned away and the words were lost in his throat.

Lander, too, felt very lonely as he made for the Washington Avenue store. He found the mule hitched at the rear of the dark building. Mounting and holding his rifle ready to repulse any attack he rode to the plain back of the city and swung into the north for his dash to St. Charles.

CHAPTER IV

THE BATTLE OF THE BULLIES

THE hamlet of St. Charles was lazily bestirring itself along its one straggling street when Lander rode his tired mule down to the river and signaled for the ferry-man to come and take him across. After some delay the man showed up and with much mumbling and grumbling set his passenger and the mule across.

Passing down the one street Lander followed the shore till he came to a seventy-five-foot keelboat, the cargo box filling the body with the exception of some ten feet at each end. The thousand feet of towing rope was coiled in the bow as the steamer from St. Louis would arrive during the day and tow it as far as Lexington. From there Bridger's boatmen under the crisp direction of Étienne Prevost would cordel and pole it to Fort Pierre, near the mouth of the Teton, or Bad River. Once they got above the mouth of the James the boating would be easier than on the lower river.

Lander was decided to stick to the boat as the long reaches of the mighty stream fascinated him. In the Fall of the previous year Kenneth McKenzie, the greatest trader ever employed by the A. F. C., whose name will always be associated with the Upper Missouri outfit stationed at Fort Union above the Yellowstone, wrote to the New York headquarters of the company that the steamboat "would permit of their keeping their men in the Indian country and paying the greater part of their wages in merchandise instead of in cash." In other words the company planned to pay wages in merchandise at three and four hundred per cent. advance on the cost. Lander had heard this plan talked over at the store and might have hesitated to go up-river as an *engagé* for the company. But going by boat up-river to Fort Pierre and ultimately joining Bridger in the mountains was a different proposition and his soul kindled to it.

Could he have but known it Lander was two years inside the beginning of that period of invasion of the great trans-Mississippi territory. Of course there had been journeyings to the mountains and back and several government exploring parties prior to 1829. There also had grown up a brisk trade with Santa Fé. But the epoch of great travel was made possible by the coming of steam to the Missouri as a permanent factor in 1829.

The New Englanders required two hundred years to reach the Mississippi. Even at that they passed through immense areas without pausing to explore thoroughly, let alone settle them. Yet within eighteen

years from the morning Lander rode his borrowed mule into sleepy St. Charles, the steamboat on the Missouri was to be responsible for a quarter of a million square miles of the Oregon country being settled. Within the same period more than half a million square miles was to be sliced off from Mexico, with Americans occupying a thousand miles of the Pacific coast. This expansion of people was even to surpass the overrunning of Europe by eastern hordes.

Lander tarried by the boat although the mountain men and boatmen were camped near by. Two thoughts now popped into his mind, and neither had to do with migrations: his love for Susette and a commercial inspiration. Although a mountain man only in embryo he had no vision of a mighty people flooding the West. If he became a mountain man a settled condition would be the last destiny he would wish for his country. Trappers were one with the Indians in wishing the land to remain as it was with wild life flourishing and multiplying.

Lander thought tenderly of Susette, then jumped from his mule to examine the keelboat more critically and to wonder why such craft must be made in Cincinnati, Louisville, or Pittsburg. It now came home to him that had he not mixed up in the duel and killed his man he might have secured a little capital and from his own "navy yard" turned out keelboats and taken a rare profit.

"But if not for the fight I'd probably hung round town, somebody's hired man," he morosely told himself as he led his mule over the slight ridge to where Bridger's men were camped.

A chorus of yells accelerated his pace and he soon beheld some twenty men singing and dancing around their morning fires while nearly as many more were crawling from their blankets and cursing the hilarity of their mates. A slim, wiry-built man walked among them, counting off on his fingers to check them up.

"Where is Long Simons? Is the fool still in St. Louis? Then he stays there, and we shall have to elect a new bully for this trip," remarked the slim man.

"Bah! That Long Simons don't rare on his hind-legs when I go by," growled a big hulk of a fellow.

"Ye never did go fo' to give him no battle, Porker," drawled a lazy Southern voice, and a young man with deep marks of dissipation on his face raised himself from his blankets and threw back his long black hair.

"I'll give ye a battle, ye whelp!" roared Porker, rushing at the prostrate youth.

The other came to his feet like a cat, a knife flashing in his hand, his white teeth gleaming wolfishly.

"Hold, hold! I, Étienne Prevost, will shoot the man who makes the first move." And Lander knew he was gazing at a celebrated mountain man, one of the galaxy which had graduated under Ashley while a mere youth. "You shall all have a chance to show your mettle. We'll settle the question before we start. The red belt is in my pack; but no knife-play. Hunter, put up that knife."

"Go to ——!" snarled Hunter, bending half double and beginning to circle about the mighty Porker who now showed signs of fear.

"Put up that knife, you fool! Haven't you sweat the rum out of you yet?" cried Prevost.

With a snarl Hunter ducked forward. Porker turned to run and secure a weapon and sprawled on his face. Hunter was astride of him in a second with the knife raised. Lander felt his stomach revolting at the sight of murder all but committed. Then Prevost fired, and with a yelp of pain and rage Hunter tottered to his feet, clasping his right wrist.

"Go back to St. Louis, you trouble-maker. Go join the A. F. C. We don't want you," coldly advised Prevost as he began reloading his pistol.

"Étienne Prevost, I'll kill you for this," screamed Hunter.

"Mebbe. But go back to St. Louis and wait for your broken wrist to mend. If you will come with me I'll fix it up until you can get treated in town."

"If I step aside with you it'll be fo' to knife you with my left hand," gritted Hunter, tying his handkerchief around his neck for a sling and walking away.

"Good riddance!" growled Prevost. Then he turned and beheld Lander staring wide-eyed on the scene.

"Who are you? What do you want?" Prevost roughly demanded, walking up to him and surveying him sharply. "You don't belong to this outfit."

"Mr. Bridger sent me here to join it,"

explained Lander. "Said I could go with the boat, or with the land party at Lexington."

"Who are you?"

Lander told him and added that he had been employed by the A. F. C. until the day before.

"If Jim Bridger knew that he never would 'a' sent you. We don't want any A. F. C. spies with us."

The men began crowding forward ominously. One man suggested they duck him in the river. Another advised tying him to his mule and driving the animal into the river. Lander laid his rifle across the saddle and reaching down pulled his knife from his boot.

"I may not be very welcome here," he said. "But some one is going to get killed before I'm ducked or tied to any mule."

PORKER, who had now recovered something of his former aplomb and fearing he had lost caste because of his mishap with Hunter, swaggered forward with a camp-ax in his hand and loudly called out:

"Ev'ry one step aside. I'll cut this young rooster's comb. . . . Gawdfrey!"

He came to an abrupt halt and rubbed his chin and grinned foolishly. To Prevost he explained:

"This hyar younker is th' one what did for Mal Phinny of th' A. F. C. outfit. Killed him las' night in a fight on Bloody Island. All St. Louis heard about it just as I was leavin' Tilton's bar to git here on time."

"Then he done a —— good job. Wish he'd done for ol' Parker," shouted one of the men, relaxing into a peaceful attitude. "If ye done that Malcom skunk ye needn't bother to keep yer gun p'inted this way, Mister Doolest."

"Jim Bridger know about the fight?" inquired Prevost, his voice shading off into courtesy.

"He gave the word for us to fire," replied Lander without shifting his rifle or relaxing his watchfulness.

"Then we've had enough of this hoss-play," said Prevost. "S'long as Bridger sent you, then you must belong. But I want to say right now that there's altogether too much cock-a-doodle-dooing here to suit me. I reckon you all need to be blooded a bit. I ain't heard nothing for forty-eight hours except fighting talk. We've just about time to settle this business before the steamboat gits here. One of you is best man and is to carry the pipe and wear the bully's red belt. Hurry up and put your weapons one side. Keelboat style, except biting and eye-gouging. Every man who's shot off his yawp is going to be licked or be a champion."

Lander restored the knife to his boot, dropped the rifle in the hollow of his arm and said:

"You can count me out. I ain't any hankering to wear your red belt."

"You'll fight when it comes your turn," Prevost coldly warned. "I never started for the mountains yet without first gitting all the bile out of a man's system. And you're too quick to stand folks off with guns and knives. Right now, before the steamer comes, we're going to decide who's who for this whole trip. Porker, seeing as you're 'lowed to be champion in place of Long Simons——"

"Whoopee!" bawled a heavy voice back in the village street.

The group turned and beheld a rangy-built man riding toward them on a vicious-looking mule. The newcomer waved his arms and loudly announced:

"Here I be. More 'gator than man. Stronger'n a buf'ler in a pushin' match. Hungry as a grizzly for a huggin' match. I've got panther blood in my body, an' th' teeth of a mountain lion. I've come to hurt somebody powerful bad. I wore th' red belt to th' mountains on th' last trip, an' I'll wear it again."

Porker stared at him uneasily, then brightened as he observed the champion was swerving from side as if half drunk.

"So you did manage to make it, eh?" growled Prevost. "A little more and it would have been your last trip with the Rocky Mountain Fur outfit."

"Ye couldn't keep me back any mor'n yer bare hands could hold a buf'ler bull back from water," drunkenly boasted Long Simons, dismounting and standing unsteadily. "I'd 'a' been here sooner but I met Hunter who'd had trouble with his arm. Stopped to fix his sling for him. He hit for St. Louis, leavin' a trail o' brimstun an' sulfur behind him. Boss, don't tell me th' red belt's been fit for an' won. If it has I'll scrunch th' man that has it."

"You're in time," snapped Prevost.

"That's more'n I can say of your condition."

He then counted the men and found the tally satisfactory. The question of physical superiority was usually settled and the red belt awarded at the start of the trip. This absorbed the fighting spirit of the men and allowed them to stick to their work without bickerings. With Prevost these annual battles meant more efficiency during the long trip to the mountains and back, a sort of a clearing-house for distempers and private feuds. Glancing over the company he said:

"As it seems to lay between Long Simons and Porker you other boys can git ready and find out who's the two best among you. Hurry it along. Any feller showing the white feather will be booted into the river. All belts and weapons back there by my tent. No biting or eye-digging. No bone-breaking after a man's beat."

Lander had heard of these contests but had never been brought face to face with the facts. His eyes opened widely as two men clinched the minute Prevost ceased speaking and rolled over the grass fighting like tiger cats. Obviously there was bad blood between the two and they had waited hungrily until the boss gave the word; now fought to hurt, to maim, to all but kill.

Lander had seen street fights in St. Louis but none that were so cold-bloodedly ferocious as this. It impressed him as being more deadly than an exchange of shots on Bloody Island. As he followed the wheel of legs and arms another couple fell to.

In this abrupt fashion, with no preliminaries to gloss the proceedings, those men who had antipathies to settle immediately came to blows and clinches. Then more slowly followed those who had no grievances to settle. Once committed to battle the latter quickly discovered their blood was hot and responded to the primitive lust.

Inside of ten minutes only Prevost, Long Simons, Porker and Lander were left standing. It was brutal work. Prevost glided among the combatants, pulling one off his man to prevent murder, urging another to a greater resistance, kicking a jaw that was endeavoring to bite into a bronzed neck, stabilizing the mêlée so his loss of man-power would be the minimum and involve nothing more serious than a broken bone.

After twenty minutes the defeated were crawling or staggering to the river to wash their wounds, and the victors were panting and eying each other wolfishly.

"Ten minutes' rest, then you what's left double up and go at it," ruled Prevost.

"I'll take on this new feller," spoke up one of the victors, and he leered malevolently at Lander.

"He's your meat," promptly ruled Prevost. "First come, first served." It was an old game for him, this umpiring of forty fighting men all in action at the same time. He supervised it with the same precision and unconcern he would exhibit in tying up a pack of beaver.

"But I don't hanker to figure as a champion," said Lander.

"Ye won't be no champion, or anywhere near it," chuckled the man who had challenged him. "Don't ye fret any."

Prevost's thin face wrinkled in disgust as he turned on Lander.

"If that's your style, if you're afeared of a little scrimmage among your friends, you ain't no man to go into the Blackfoot country, not even if Jim Bridger did send you," he grunted. "Hook on to Rummy there or hit the trail for St. Louis."

Lander felt a sudden rage boiling up in his heart against the leering Rummy. The brutality of the spectacle coming on top of the duel and the night's hard ride had sapped his fighting spirit. But Prevost's disdain was a spur that dug him cruelly. While the time-honored custom of fighting the fight out of the men was a sound one he could not see how it should apply to him, a stranger, who had evidenced no desire to bully any one.

"Time's up! Make it sharp!" ordered Prevost.

The man called Rummy grinned exultingly, revealing several blanks where front teeth had been, and dived into Lander before the latter could set himself. At first Lander was propelled backward and with difficulty kept his feet. Prevost watched him with contempt. Then he caught his balance, dug a heel into the sward and brought Rummy's rush to a abrupt halt. The man instantly shifted his hold and had him by the throat. Almost as quick Lander's two hands shot up inside his opponent's arms and with an outward fling easily broke the hold and began hammering his man unmercifully.

Rummy had scant knowledge of fisticuffs and, like most of his mates, depended on close quarters for success, his technique consisting of kicking, choking and bone-breaking.

With a terrific smack Lander's left caught him between the eyes and jolted the thick head back. Rummy grunted and shook his head and gamely bored in again.

With a swinging upper-cut Lander's right went to his jaw, straightening him out in the air. When he struck the turf he remained very quiet.

"This is all —— foolishness!" Lander fumed at Prevost.

Prevost smiled crookedly, his eyes twinkling.

"It's the kind of foolishness that keeps you from digging back to St. Louis where they might make it hot for you along of what you done to a A. F. C. man," he said.

There had been five couples in the last bout, and Lander and his man had been the first to finish.

"Pretty nifty work, younker," chuckled Long Simons. "But ye can pound my head all day without botherin' me any, 'less ye git so tarnal careless as to bust my pipe. *Then* I would git mad."

Prevost leaped among the fighters and pulled a couple apart and warned:

"That's enough. You two been chewing each other. If I see any more biting I'll spoil the biter's teeth for good."

The two got to their feet, both claiming the victory. Prevost motioned them to retire, saying, "Neither of you is any good." Turning to the remaining three couples he soon had the winners standing apart; these with Lander made four survivors from the mill.

"Send 'em along. I'm gittin' sleepy from waitin'," growled Porker.

"Ye big hog!" snorted Long Simons. "Want to fight 'em when they can't toddle? Mister Prevost, some of 'em oughter be matched ag'in' us two now afore they git any tireder."

"Shut up," snapped Prevost. Then to the four men: "Match up. The winners go against Porker and Simons."

"I'll take this A. F. C. killer," promptly spoke up a man with long sandy mustaches and light blue eyes. The other two instantly fell upon each other.

LANDER'S challenger stepped backward, saying:

"Let's have plenty of room to operate in, young feller. Seein' as how ye fight a new-fangled way I don't want to be crowded."

Lander felt no hostility toward this chap. The sandy hair and blue eyes and grinning mouth suggested good-nature. He held his hands ready to foil a rush, and as Prevost became busy overseeing the other couple he took time to murmur—

"D'ye want to fight that Porker or Long Simons?"

"I'll fight anything," coldly answered Lander, striking a pawing hand aside.

"Wal, I won't." The confession was accompanied by a chuckle. "So ye needn't be hoggish in mountin' me, for ye're goin' to win mighty easy."

As he said this he deftly secured a grip on Lander's right wrist, dodged a drive of the left, and closed in. With both arms about Lander's waist and his head burrowing into his chest he proceeded to give a demonstration of striving to lift Lander off his feet. For a few moments Lander feared being thrown and struggled viciously, using his left against the head with short-armed jabs.

"What'n —— ye tryin' to do?" came the muffled query. "Tryin' to git me mad? I ain't hurtin' ye any, be I?"

Then Lander realized his opponent was content to cling to him. With a sour grin Lander accepted the proposition and displayed great activity in swirling about. Once they went down with Lander underneath, but the other dexterously threw himself on his side, and with a spurt of strength pulled Lander on top. Then with a groan he relaxed his hold and lay still.

Lander got to his feet and stared in dismay. He had played the other fellow's game, yet by some accident the man was unconscious, or worse. Picking up a camp kettle Lander ran to the river and brought water and doused it over the silent figure.

"Young man, you git 'em quick. No doubt about that," called out Prevost.

Lander threw more water. With the celerity of a Jack-in-the-box the man bobbed to a sitting posture and cunningly winked an eye. In deep relief Lander dropped the kettle. Prevost was calling out:

"New man wins. Perkins wins. Rest up and go against Simons and Porker."

Lander was still fresh, but for the sake of the quitter's good name he simulated fatigue and took time to study Porker. The man was so named because of his bulk. To grapple with him would be useless as the man's sheer weight would carry any ordinary antagonist down to defeat. Nor did Lander believe his sturdiest blows could register any effect on the round, shaggy head. He eyed the waistline speculatively. That man's abdomen was laced with muscles built up during long mountain trips. So far as Lander could perceive there was no vulnerable point, neither jaw nor wind. But because of the man's height he decided to play for the wind.

"Do you feel fit?" Prevost kindly inquired aften ten minutes had elapsed.

Lander nodded and stepped quickly forward to meet Porker. The latter eyed him sardonically and waited for him to come within reach, and then flung out his flail of a hand. Lander passed under it and drove his right into the pit of the bully's stomach, and as he delivered the blow he realized he was adapting the pose of a knife-fighter, and he remembered Papa Clair's parting advice to "keep behind the point."

The blow resounded loudly and drove a grunt from Porker. Some of the men set up a cheer but Lander felt the resilient muscles give and come back under his fist and knew that mode of attack was as useless as to beat a buffalo with the bare hands. He was out of reach of the long arms and circling about for another jab almost before Porker knew he had been hit.

Porker's eyes grew lurid. His pride was hurt.

"Ye —— bug!" he roared. "Tryin' to make fun o' me, eh? Wal, I'll l'arn ye from childhood up."

Simons had his man tucked comfortably away under one arm and was refraining from inflicting punishment. A wide grin cracked his face as he watched Lander.

"All he makes me think of is a knife-fighter," he bawled out, "an' he do make me think o' that most dingly. Hit him ag'in, ye weasel! Give him one in th' snoot!"

Lander maneuvered warily, his left hand out at one side, his right hand advanced with the elbow almost touching the hip. Porker lurched toward him, vilely berating him for running away after "takin' a man by s'prize." Lander evaded the clawing hands and sent his right under the chin just as he would have lunged with the point, with his whole body behind the blow. The massive jaw might be impervious to the bare fist, just as the strongly muscled abdomen could ignore anything short of a mule's kick, but as he happened to be holding his tongue between his teeth he bit it cruelly.

"—— yer hide!" he roared, spitting blood and rushing frantically to grapple his tormentor.

"Bully for ye, younker! Bleed him some more! Lawd, a big fool like that lettin' a child lick him!" howled Long Simons, shaking his man up and down in a paroxysm of joy.

"Wait'll I git my hooks into ye!" snarled Porker.

Lander swung both fists, the double *smack* landing on nose and eye. The nose began to bleed and the eye grew puffy.

"Haw haw! I'm waitin'!" yelled Simons, letting his man drop to the ground and crawl away while he pounded his huge hands together in delight.

"Good fighting!" applauded Prevost.

But the contest was too unequal to continue in Lander's favor. His agility and audacity in taking the fight to Porker had dazed the bully and won a temporary advantage. He had a theory of offense that might have worked out successfully could he have kept clear of the madly swinging arms. The brawny throat was sensitive, he concluded. He proved it by leaping forward and landing a stiff jab. No great damage was done yet Porker was taken with a fit of coughing, and could Lander have hammered in more blows on the throat it is possible he would have downed his man.

Porker now threw all discretion aside and rushed at his nimble adversary with the ferocity of a mad bull, swinging his long arms and ponderous fists in a thoroughly unscientific manner. It was useless to guard against such an onslaught. For a minute or two Lander ducked and dodged or slipped away, with no opportunity to take the offensive. Then he caught a buffet on the head that knocked him violently on to his back, the wind driven from his body. With a howl of triumph Porker jumped forward to stamp on him.

Prevost's pistol cracked and the lead fanned the infuriated man's face, and the leader's voice was warning——

"Through your thick skull, Porker, if you don't pull up."

"He's my meat," gasped Porker, turning his bloody visage toward Prevost.

"I'll shoot you and stick you in a tree to dry if you don't come away. You won the fight. That's all."

"But he blooded me," protested Porker.

"Shucks! It ain't nothin' to what I'm goin' to do with ye once ye git over pumpin' for wind," bellowed Long Simons, lounging nearer, his ham-like hands held before him, half closed like a gorilla's, his huge shoulders sagging and rising.

With a husky bleat Porker turned to clinch him, but Simons waved him back, warning:

"Take yer time. Ye'll need lots of wind to buck ag'in' me. Git yer breath. I don't want no one sayin' I ran foul o' ye while ye was tuckered out. I've heard th' talk ye've been makin' an' I'm goin' to make ye eat yer words. This row atween ye 'n' me is goin' to be a real fight, I reckon."

Calmed by his realization of the desperate game ahead of him, and disquieted by observing Simons seemed to have sobered off quite thoroughly, Porker walked to the river-bank and splashed the cold water over his head and shoulders. Prevost helped Lander sit up and the sandy-haired chap who had quit brought water and bathed his head. For a minute Lander could not identify himself and stared foolishly at the rough men and wondered why they were so bruised and battered. They grinned at him sympathetically, and by degrees the details of the fight came back to him.

Long Simons came up, his hairy face suggesting a grizzly bear learning to smile, and endorsed:

"Younker, ye shore some game-cock. When ye grow up ye'll be some fighter. Shake!"

Lander gave a limp hand, then glimpsed Porker reclining on the grass and hotly declared—

"I can kill him with a knife inside of sixty seconds."

"Did you kill Phinny with a knife?" dryly asked Prevost.

"With a pistol," was the faint answer; and the lust to kill deserted him.

"Being such a master hand for bloodlettin' you'll do fine to let loose in the Blackfoot country butcher-shop when we git there," Prevost ironically observed. "You also could murder Porker with a gun. You don't seem to understand that this is a friendly fight to see who shall wear the red belt. All bad blood is s'posed to be spilled right here. If you go to the mountains with me I don't want to hear any more threats against any of my men. Not even if you was Jim Bridger's brother."

LANDER burned hotly under the rebuke. He recognized the justice of it and apologized.

"That crack over the head made me see red. I'm not looking to fight any one with a knife. I told you I didn't want to fight any of the men. I knew Porker would best me when I went against him. I just tried to make it a good one while it lasted."

"Said handsome enough to suit a Quaker," chuckled Prevost. "And you made it a good one and plenty more. . . . Hi, Porker! How's the breathing?"

"Good!" growled Porker, clambering to his feet and pulling off his buckskin shirt and standing forth a hairy behemoth of a man. "An' if that child 'lows his little dancin' lesson with me was a good fight jest let him watch me chaw up Long Simons as easy as a 'gator chaws a puppy."

"Ye'd feel a heap better, Porky, if yer heart was ahind them bold words," said Long Simons laughingly as he peeled to the buff. "Now I'm comin' to make a call on ye."

"Th' latch-string is out, —— yer ugly face!"

With monstrous impact they crashed together; and Lander forgot his aching head in watching the two Titans. Their barrel-like chests came together until it did not seem that bone and sinew could withstand the shock. Then they secured grips and scarcely moving their feet began straining and lifting and pulling, seeking an advantage whereby an arm would snap or a muscle tear loose. They were primitive forces, eschewing all man-made rules excepting the embargo laid down by Prevost.

The boss watched them anxiously, fearful of losing the services of one, and yet knowing the two must fight it out now or be fighting later on, and fighting perhaps

with something besides their bare strength.

Evenly matched in weight and seemingly of equal strength and experience, there seemed no choice between them at first. But as they slowly revolved about and Lander saw the wide, contented grin on Simons' face and the deep scowl on Porker's brow he wisely suspected the former was very confident and that the latter was much worried. At that, within the first minute Porker got his man at a decided disadvantage, and had he not lusted too prematurely to end it then and there he might have scored a triumph. But he worked too hard and fast and within another minute the odds vanished and they were breast to breast again.

The struggle both sickened and fascinated Lander. On the faces of the other men he beheld only a breathless interest. Observing the expression on Lander's face Prevost smiled grimly and said:

"The man who has the guts to go after beaver where we're going looks on this rassling as just play. You think they'll kill each other. No such thing. They'll maul and pound each other, and if I wasn't here they'd bite and claw each other. Worst that can come of it is a busted leg or arm, and one of them out of it for the season. That's all that worries me."

He was interrupted by a mighty *spank!* Porker had loosed a hand and had dealt Long Simons a terrific clout on the head. Simons' head rocked back, and Porker, with visions of a clear title to the red belt, gave a whoop and sought to follow up his advantage. Then Simons' apish arms closed about him.

There followed a convulsive struggle, Porker tearing at his opponent's bearded face to force him to release his crushing hold. Then a moment of weakening, and Porker found himself over his opponent's hip. The next moment he crashed headlong to the ground and lay there insensible.

Throwing back his shoulders Long Simons flapped his arms and sounded the cock's crow of triumph. Prevost examined the unconscious man, then curtly announced:

"He'll do. Nothing broken. The red belt is yours for another trip, Simons. That is, unless this newcomer wants a try for it."

He pointed toward the village, where a man on a mule was quitting the street to ride toward the camp.

"Papa Clair!" cried Lander. "Lord! What does he want here? And riding so fast." And a nameless chill gripped his heart as he watched the old man flog the mule to greater efforts.

"There comes th' steamboat! See her smoke below th' bend!" excitedly yelled Rummy.

TO BE CONTINUED

The King's Sword

By Charles Beadle

Author of "Witch-Doctors," "The Singing Monkey," etc.

I WAS sitting on the terrasse of the Grand Hôtel de Paris et de l'Univers trying to reduce the heat with bad beer when I first saw his tall figure plowing through the sand of the broiling plaza toward the jetty on the sandy, rocky beach with a stride which no native ever had. As he passed close by I noted the raw-boned cheeks, burned as red-brown as a white man's could be, above a ragged, sandy beard a foot long; the skin sandals and the patched and dirty beach-comber's suit of khaki.

"Funny duck," I commented, and wondered idly what a long, slender object wrapped in rags, which he carried gun-fashion, could be; who he was, and what tide of fortune had thrown him in such a plight in this forsaken sore on the lip of hell.

When to my regret I had to return aboard the Norddeutscher *Marie Augusta* I was surprized to see him again. He was leaning over the poop rail near the spare steering-gear, where for a consideration I had been permitted to sling my hammock between the awning stanchions in a vain effort to get as far away as possible from the composite odors of my traveling companions, Greeks, Armenians, Syrians, Levantine Jews. He was still hugging the long, slender object which at first I thought was a native gun of some sort, though it was too flat for such. As I came up he looked me over from head to foot, resentfully I imagined.

"Just come aboard?" I remarked conversationally.

"Aye," he assented curtly, took another swift glance at me and added—

"And where would ye be going?"

"Don't know," said I cheerfully.

"And what would ye be doing when ye get there?"

"Again I don't know!" I confessed.

There was not a shadow of a smile on the cadaverous features, which I noticed at the same time had curious marks and streaks of dull black or brown; but there was just a glimmer of a twinkle in the deep-set green eyes.

"Mebbe ye're as loony as Ah am maself?" he demanded truculently.

"Possibly," I assented. "Have a cigaret?"

"Mebbe Ah've forgotten how."

He took the cigaret and as he bent his turbaned head to light it I saw that in place of his right ear was an ugly scar. He inhaled.

"Ah've no' forgotten," he commented, and inhaled again. "This is the first smoke Ah've had for four year an' more, and ye're the first white man Ah've spoken to for thrree. Would ye believe it?"

"Oh, yes. Come down from the interior, eh?"

"Aye, from the interior. . . . Ou, aye!"

The idea seemed to contain some secret joke, for he actually smiled.

"Ah'm Scotch," he added abruptly. "What would ye name be?"

"Robert Flaxen."

"Roberrt, do ye say? Ah'm Roberrt. Roberrt Brruce and a', King o' Scotlan' and o' Dakko."

"How d'you do!" said I inanely, embarrassed by this assertion.

Covertly I had another look at him and decided again:

"Funny duck. Mad as a hatter. Sunstroke probably."

He did not attempt to qualify the extraordinary statement but remained smoking rather clumsily, staring at the crowd of small craft about the hull of the ship. Several times I tried to draw him into conversation, but he had become deaf.

THE *Marie Augusta* steamed from the shore, which appeared like a cinder-heap, and began to throb down the Red Sea. The chattering gangs of Greeks and Levantines, losing the excitement of a port, sprawled about dozing and jabbering lazily.

Lying on the deck with a spare anchor for a pillow, I smoked on, leaving my "funny duck" to his own devices. Having met many queer characters wandering around the earth, I knew enough to humor him; knew too that before long the impulse to talk to a fellow white would burst the dam of years of repression.

At last he abandoned his attitude on the rail and came and sat beside me. I put my packet of cigarets upon the deck between us. He took one without comment and smoked away. At close quarters the gash of the missing ear began to fascinate me so that I could scarcely take my eyes away.

Once a couple of officials going to Mombasa came wandering disdainfully among the nondescript crowd upon the poop, and stared hard at us; but, being Britishers, they did not attempt to speak. The German band brayed and trumpeted away as usual during the afternoon. When the first dinner bugle's pompous note rang out my reticent friend turned and remarked—

"Wull ye no' be going to put on ye duds?"

"We don't dress here," said I, smiling.

"Whaat! Are ye deck?"

"Yes; why not? And by the way we'd better go and grab a pannikin and get to the galley, else there'll be nothing left after this bunch get through."

As he gathered up his precious long parcel he stopped me and said suggestively—

"Look ye, laddie, Ah've got some siller if ye——"

"Thanks very much," said I; "but I've got enough to carry me to nowhere in particular."

We ate our mess sitting on the anchor and afterward sprawled smoking silently, watching the night like a great blue bird sweep over from Arabia turning the solid turquoise of the sea into deep sapphire. Our Levantine companions had mostly curled up on mats and blankets; a few were still squatting in groups smoking and chatting softly.

The band amidships was swinging away at an Austrian waltz to which the engines appeared to be dancing, and my thoughts had wandered when a touch on the arm from my strange friend drew my attention.

"Ma wee chuck!" he whispered like a lover, and glancing down I saw gleaming like a blue snake in the starlight the blade of a two-handed sword.

"For Heaven's sake!"

I began recognizing the mysterious parcel, too flat to be a gun.

"Hauld ye whisht, laddie! We ha' no need o' these loons around," he cautioned me, caressing the naked blade. "Ah'm telling ye this was the claymore o' me faither's faither's faither, Roberrt Brruce, King o' Scotland."

"Good Lord! Is that so?" said I, a little bewildered.

"Aye, that's so!"

And in a crooning voice he chanted softly:

> "Scots wha ha'e wi' Wallace bled!
> Scots wham Bruce has aaften led!
> Welcome to your gory bed
> Or to Victor-ie!"

For a moment he sat with long fingers on the blade staring rapt at the dark of the starlit horizon. The strains of the "Merry Widow" surged above the swish of water and the throb of the engines and ceased.

"Mon," he exclaimed, turning to me, "I'll have to talk or kill some one!"

"Oh, talk," said I, and repressed a desire to laugh.

"Ou, aye, I'll talk."

Very gently he took off the rags around

the hilt of the great sword and placed it between us.

"Let Her lie there," said he, and fell to gazing at the horizon again.

Then he said suddenly:

"Would you believe that once I was a schulmaster? Well, I was. Aye, a long, long time ago. But ah, laddie, it's sae guid ta hear th' tongue o' ma ain folk, the tongue that Roberrt Brruce did talk. . . . Aye, mon, it's a pity ye're no' a Scot!"

He nestled himself down more comfortably in the crook of the anchor fluke and lighted a cigaret. Covertly I regarded his silhouette against the ship's rail and the stars and perhaps by suggestion I imagined I could see in the form, divested of the filthy clothes and the ragged beard, something of the haughty carriage and features of a chief of a Highland clan. The band had struck up another Austrian waltz when he began quietly:

"AYE, I was schulmaster. It seems like an hundred years ago—and mair.

"Ye'll no' know Auchtfermline, I'm thinking? Well, that's from where I come as ye should know if ye know anything of Scottish history—aye, but half of that's lies as most histories are. I was born under the shadow as it were of this wee sword."

Continually he sought every excuse to touch the weapon, as a lover caresses his mistress.

"Times change unfortunately. Instead of a king they made me into a schulmaster. A Scot's dry jest; aye, laddie?"

I heard him chuckle.

"Well, well; when I went up to Edinburgh I couldn't leave ma pet. Always She seemed to me as my mascot—totem if ye like—and for why no'? I tried to get away from Her.

"Years wasted on. Sometimes I'd sit the night through smoking my pipe wi' mebbe a wee drop beside me and staring at yon claymore on the wall and the gleam o' the lamp upon Her would seem to be a derisive grin at me, a Roberrt Brruce, teaching the bairns like any Lowland loon. I'd be auld and gray, but never would I buy back the land that was mine if I blethered wi' the brains for a' ma life.

"Aye! I suffered in those days, me with the blood running in ma veins—clogging, it was—and the smell o' wild heather in ma nose! Mebbe I drank a wee more than was guid for a schulmaster. Mebbe I could hear the tramp of men and feel the swing o' the kilts. Mon, the skirl o' the bagpipes would send me nigh daft and fu' for a week!"

As he paused the rhythm of the engines and the band surged up against the bright stars.

"One night—'twas early morn, I mind me—I rose on my feet and cursed the soul o' me and swore on the gleaming body o' Her that was King Roberrt's I'd gang ma ain gait ither than a schulmaster o' the toun. An' I did, laddie; I did. I plucked Her from the wall and Ah left with never a worrd; aye, an' they've never seen me since and mebbe they never will an' a'. Mebbe we'll carve another kingdom and mebbe we won't, but never again will She sneer at me from the wall.

"Aweel, laddie, we took train to London toun and on the docks I found me a ship which was sailing for Africa where at least it seemed to me we'd mebbe hear the cries of bloody battle o' men that fought on their ain good legs.

"I'd ta'en what patrimony was mine and wi' it we bought ourselves an outfit, as they call it, and landed at Mombasa. I took on some work for a while wi' the Uganda rail—just enough to learn the lingo a wee bit. After that we wandered through Uganda and up the Nile to Gondokoro—aye, but that's a gousty hole!"

"Yes, it's desolate enough," I agreed. "I've been in the Wadai country."

"Ye don't say! Well, I didna stop there long, for I'd gotten a bee in ma bonnet to go trading for ivory away beyond the Bahr el Ghazal. But I'm no' telling the story o' ma trading life, which is a'most as dull as a schulmaster's.

"I'd been there aboot four years I'm thinking and I was no' doing so bad. I mind me one day after the floods when I'd been doing a bit o' reckoning and I saw that I'd need mebbe another five year o' the trading business before I'd be able to buy the land o' Auchtfermline. Five year seemed no' so long, but o' night when after ma wee sooper I'd be sitting in ma store the starlight on Her would sometimes play the auld tricks, and I'd see Her yonder sneering at me as if She'd say—

" 'And what would Roberrt Brruce be doin' wi' a pedlar's pack?'

"I mind me well I'd haver wi' Her just as I'm talking to you now. I'd try to tell Her that this wicked worrld was no' the same as yon time o' the Border.

"Hoo the de'il could I out wi' Her for a foray against a clan o' cattle-owners? Hoo the de'il could I wet Her wi' a mon's bluid for naught? I'm telling ye this so mebbe ye'll on'erstand hoo it was that when the guid God— Aweel, ye'll see.

"I'd have ye know that ma store was away to —— and gone on one o' those *bahrs* as they call 'em, a bit south o' the Shillook country in a place which tapped the old caravan trail from the French Congo where a' the rubber and most o' the ivory comes from, and mebbe a slave or two instead o' the hundreds they used to have bound for Khartum. I'm no' so bad at picking up the tongue and by that time I could speak both the local dialect and Arabic more'n a wee.

"I HAD a kind o' factor, Suliman, who was quite an auld lad in his way. And for the sake o' a chat I'd often haver wi' him aboot the ways o' the native life. They're queer enough as ye'd know mebbe.

"Well, one day when 'twas as hot as the hinges o' —— I was lying on ma bunk on the veranda and Suliman was squatting beside me argle-bargling away at somethin' or ither when I was thinking o' a caravan that was due in aboot a month after the flood had subsided. I asked him aboot the state o' the moon that night. He said 'twas the last quarter, but mebbe the *safari* would be held up in the Bantook country to the west for a day or so.

"And when I asked him for why he out wi' a story which set me by the lugs.

"According to Suliman this clan o' the Bantook," the Scot continued after lighting another cigaret, "had a way o' their ain for choosing their *malik*, which means king in Arabic. Instead o' one family continuing the kingship from father to son as most of 'em do Suliman said that they fight for the job ev'ry year, reckoned as ye know by the Nile flood seasons.

"The idea was that upon the king depended the flood just the same as most clans do wi' their wizards, on'y yon fellow was both king and wizard. He lived apart from the others in a holy place. But, mon, the stockade of the holy place surrounding the king's dwelling was, so they said, made entirely of tusks of ivory!

"Anybody could be king who could spit t'other in fair fight. During the month of the full moon after the flood the king body had naught to do but fight wi' the clan, for the puir souls thought that because the king was responsible for the flood and the whole tribe's welfare, ye understand, he must be the bravest o' men.

"As far as I could gather and Suliman knew, for the bodies are no' given to haverin' o'ermuch aboot their secrets, the stockade of ivory was built wi' a wee bit entrance so no mair than one could enter. At the door during this sacred month he met the king and if he could spit him then he occupied the royal manse, but he had to fight for it. If he could kill all those who sought the divine job for the rest of the sacred month then he remained king until the following year.

"Just to think of it, mon! If it were true there would be enough ivory to buy the whole bonnie land o' Auchtfermline! Ou aye, says I, but hoo the de'il am I to get away wi' several tons mebbe?

"But it was no' the ivory, laddie. She it was yonder that seemed to gleam as if She were laughing! From what the factor said 'twould surely be a bonnie fight, for yon Bantook are spunky lads.

"Well, when I told Suliman that I was going to be the next king the mon thocht I was fu'. At first he was too scairt to listen to me, but the more I dreamed on it the more determined I bacame. At the worrst, says I, Roberrt Brruce'll be a king once more. D'ye on'erstand, mon, hoo the idea got away wi' me?"

He threw his head back and hooted softly rather than laughed, as if moved by the recollection of the original excitement.

"Well, laddie, as ye well ken, once a Scot gets a bee in his bonnet it takes more'n an English provost to drive it oot o' him. I sent awa' a' the ivory I had and bribed Suliman to come wi' me to the Bantook country. And wi' us I took a' ma trade guids for a wee bit present or so after the manner o' the country, ye on'erstand.

"So I'd no' confuse the childer o'ermuch I stained ma body black, for, thocht I, if the bodies see I'm white mebbe it would interfere wi' some o' their pet taboos. I thocht I had a canny idea then o' making Suliman stop near me and when I was king

mebbe I could find a way to pass out the stuff to him, but at that time I was no' read in their crazy ways.

"But one thing I did find oot was that when I would be king I would be safe after the end of the moon—that is for a year. I mean they're no' particulair who the de'il is the king so long as he's brave for, ye on'erstand, wi' 'em they kind o' mix god and king. Will-a-wa, ye'll see—as I did!

"I arrived a week before the gala night. I made no advairtisement o' my wee single-man foray, but just talked saft and stopped quiet. They began the moon quietly enough, for I on'erstood that the carnival and the dance didna start until the king-making job was over. At one time I thocht I had a canny idea—to wait until the last night o' the moon so I could take whatever king was there at the end of his vigil when he'd be more or less worn out. But, losh mon, the idea was no' sporting! Besides I couldna bide quiet and watch Her yonder when there was a first-class fecht going for the asking.

"Well, the holy place was aboot six miles away from the village upon a bit of an isle in a *bahr* choked wi' sudd. The first trouble was hoo the de'il was I going to get there wi'out warning the clan; for mebbe, thocht I, they'd interfere wi' me. But when I was king they'd no' dare.

"Suliman, once he had gotten over the idea that I was loony and was determined that he'd never see me alive again, which would mean the remainder of the guids and guns for him, arranged matters pretty well. Being painted up black too helped, for they'd no' know the deefference in the moonlight if a body saw me making for the place in a canoe.

"I took along some tobacco and a Colt although I had no mind to use that, for I had no doubt that it wouldna be in accordance wi' their Queensbury rules, but I thocht mebbe it would be useful in case something went wrong and catching me they might be wishful to practise some fancy death upon me, ye on'erstand. Ha' ye ony more matches?"

THE band had ceased. Most of our companions were curled up asleep in the heat. As the ship's bells rang out the vibrations seemed to change into the dancing ripples of light of the stars upon the sea. He had raised himself a little on the anchor-fluke and his green eyes were luminous in the dim light.

"We set out about four in the morning, Suliman and maself. We found the canoe he'd hidden away doon the river and paddled awa' as saft as mebbe. Eh, laddie, I mind me hoo She laughed in the moonlight as She lay athwart ma thighs!"

He caressed the hilt of the great sword again and hooted softly.

"Whether or no' it wasna the fashionable thing to attack the king body on the first night I never knew, but a' the same not a body did we see. Aye, mon, by the time we came to the sudd bank, which as ye'll know is aboot fifteen feet high and riddled wi' wee canals, I was that fu' o' lust that I scarce had knowledge o' the mosquitoes! I cursed Suliman for an unsonsy gaberlunyie while we wandered aroond the maze o' canals luiking for the wee bit isle.

"After aboot twa hour, or so it seemed to me, we broke on a sudden oot o' a wee dark glen into the moonlight and aw over the long grass o' the island the black o' a number o' huts against the green o' the sky. We backed into the sudd again to reconnoiter a bit. I saw that if the king body were on the luikout from the top o' a hut mebbe he could see a man advancing through the grass. The only way of approach was after the native way—by wriggling through the grass. I'm a Hi'lan' mon, ye ken, and no' a bad stalker.

"I give Suliman his final orders and, crouching as flat as possible in the canoe, made him paddle me to the fringe o' the island. As soon as I had slipped o'erboard into the swamp hugging Her to ma bosom, Suliman backs awa'.

" 'Allah be wi' ye!' I mind I shouted after him saftly, and he turned and showed his teeth in the moonlight thinking, I had na doobt, that the guns and the guids were hisn, the black scut!

"Aweel, I made ma way on to the firm land, crouching a' the time, ye understand. Aye, mon, but 'twas a de'il o' a job. If I had ha' known where the wee bit gate was I'd ha' got to ma feet and rushed the king body.

"Aboot thirrty yards fra the water I got a scairt. I came upon one o' those water pythons making his way on his belly same as maself. Mebbe he was as scairt as I was. They don't bite, as ye'll know, but would squeeze a body to death. At any rate he gave me jist enough time to get Her yonder

into play and She took off his head. But a' the same I had to get to ma feet and move to avoid his coils.

"Twenty yards awa' I flopped again, wondering whether or no the flash o' Her in the light had been seen or mebbe maself when I had to run.

"Mebbe I was a wee bit vexed wi' the python for interfering, for I got impatient o' the stalking, or mebbe I reckoned I'd no' give the king body time to get himself together for the fecht; but I began to run crouching, ye on'erstand. Aboot fifty yards and I stooped and, speirin' over the grass-tops, could make out the gleam o' the ivory fence, and, I thocht, a wee black gap which should be the door.

"Noo the king body was no' alone. He had his women and slaves wi' him, but according to Suliman they were no' supposed to join in the battle. But, thocht I, they'd surely help the body by keeping watch mebbe.

"Aweel, I couldna know the truth until I was there, so I ran along to mebbe twenty yards o' the fence door. Then wi' Her grippet in ma twa hands I rushed, yelling the battle cry o' the clan—

" 'Scots wa' ha' a'!' "

IN HIS excitement he had raised the great sword on high, and his yell rang across the water, startling the sleeping crowd about. They sat up, chattering among themselves. But of this audience he was unconscious. He continued, clutching the hilt of the sword in his two hands between his knees.

"The king body was awaiting me just within the ivory fence. A braw laddie he was, mebbe half a head taller than I. He had a javelin—a spear ye ken—and a kind o' mace. I caught the gleam o' the spear in the light o' the moon and as he let me have it She clove it in twain!

"As I swung roond he at me wi' yon battle-ax, but I was o'er quick for him. As I came back wi' Her he sprang like a scotched monkey for a' his bulk. But She flew the circle and took his wrist as he swung the ax again.

"Ne'er before nor since did I see the like o' that, for the black-avisaged de'il caught the falling ax wi' his left, wi' his own right hand still clutching it! And before I could recover he nigh had ma head, taking instead this left lug o' mine.

"But in the moment, ye ken, I hadna felt it going, and She caught him 'tween the neck and the shoulder and clove him to his breast, as the Guid Buik says. Then as ma mon slid to the ground what would I do but put the fallen ax in the welter o' bluid. . . ."

Leaping to his feet panting with excitement, he began to dance the Scottish sword dance, yelling a chant as wild as any native song. Several of the Armenians and Levantines around us started to their feet and ran in panic, and from somewhere forward a rough German voice bade him to be quiet. At the second shout he ceased and calmly sat down with a great sigh, remarking—

"Losh, mon, but 'twas a grrand fecht!"

From around us came shuffling and whispering whilst he gazed reminiscingly at the star-glinted sea. Guttural complaining about drunken steerage people mumbled. Seven bells rang out clatteringly. He turned to me with his teeth agleam in the glow of his cigaret.

"Mon," said he as one turning a tasty morsel over with his tongue, "but 'twas grrand! . . . For how long I was dancing I ha' no idea. Mebbe 'twas scarce twa minute, mebbe 'twas twenty an' mair. But I mind I ha' never tasted o' ony liquor that was sae sweet!

"Ehh! But it's guid ta be drunken wi' bluid, as mony a mon kens well if he would on'y admeet it! There's juist that wee body away doun in a mon that's sae thirsty, the wee body that ye see in the eye o' a cat wi' a mouse, bluidy-pawed an' a'!

"Aweel, where's the real mon who's worth more'n a silver bawbee who hasna a leppen tiger the ither side o' his Christian soul? Ha' ye ever kilt ye mon?" he demanded.

"I don't think so," I replied. "Not that I'm sure of anyway."

"Aweel, ye'll no' on'erstand, I'm thinkin'."

"But that's what She taught me," said he, caressing the great sword beside him. "That's what She taught me. And She still has a drought, ye on'erstand. Ou aye, She still has a drought!"

He paused to lick his lips.

"Aweel, I maunna go bletherin'. . . . When I could, I stopped. I saw aroond me in the moonlight a circle o' broun bodies squatting on their hinderpairts howling like

jackals. Scairt they were an' a'. And I ha' no wonder, for 'twas not every day they saw the like o' me in ma wee bit kilt, broun as a blackamoor; and Her 'twixt ma twa hands!

"They were a' the king's slaves and his women, ye on'erstand. They wanted to haver wi' me, saying hoo bonnie I was and a' that, but I was sae fu' I would ha' none o' it and drove 'em off to their huts. Mebbe, thocht I, I'll have anither candidate for king upon ma hands. I got some water in a calabash and washed ma lug and wi' a bit o' ma kilt bound it up.

"For the rest o' the night I sat by the wee gate listening mostly. But no one came nigh. When the dawn rose I walked aroond ma castle and saluted maself as King of Scotlan' an' Dakko."

He paused to hoot softly.

"FROM the hut doors and roond the corners I saw them a' speirin' at me, no doobt to see what manner o' king I was. I ca'd' em all together and harangued 'em.

"A dozen o' women there were, young broun things, never a one over fourteen; for the king, I learned, was given the choice o' the land.

"But I was never a lad wi' the lasses, white or broun. Mebbe I did flatter maself that their broun eyes like antelopes seemed kind o' saft-like; but I told 'em that I was a bachelor, and bachelor I would remain. At that there was a de'il of a clatter. Never a king fra Solomon up, I ken well, who hadna a bonny taste wi' the lassies save for me!

"Aweel, they went on argle-bargling aboot it until the hunger in me cried out and I packed 'em off to bring me milk and food. Just as the sun was climbing over the palisade o' ivory came the de'il o' a clishma-claver from the grass. The girls and the men slaves began to howl back at 'em, telling of the mightiness o' the battle.

"After a *shauri* of aboot half an hour or more two very old men—wizards, ye on'erstand—came to the entrance o' the wee bit gate and after saluting me standing there wi' Her on guard began to clear oop the mess o' him lying sae bluidy; for, ye on'erstand, a king body has tae be buried in a special way sae none o' his precious holy bluid is wasted. They took him together wi' the bluidy airth and cut the puir body into four pieces, each one o' which they buried wi' a de'il of a clamjamfrie in four different districts o' the country; for the puir loons think that wherever the holy body is buried the crops will grow stronger and richer than ever.

"If, they say, there were no king kilt and buried then there would be no crops at a', but the greater number slain the richer are the crops and the more prosperous is the tribe. Mebbe, thocht I, the crops that year wouldna be sae rich as aforetime, for no intention had I, ye on'erstand, of being manure for a set o' black cattle-thieves as they were.

"Evidently, a'though they'd no' tell me so, the fecht was off while the sun was up, so after the wizard bodies had gone awa' wi' the bluidy corpse, chanting and howling like fiends, I squatted by the door and had a wee bit nap fra time to time while the women and the slaves watched me fra the huts. When darkness came I put one young lad op on the roof-tree, telling him that if he didna keep a guid luikout She'd take him in two pieces as She had done the late king body. Scairt he was, believing that She was indeed big magic.

"It was nigh the crack o' dawn before the first candidate arrived. The lad on the roof heard the grass rustle and hooted, ye on'erstand. But the candidate was na guid at a', for the puir fule was crawling on his belly and when he stuck his head within the gate I just had to let Her fall on his neck. It reminded me o' the Frenchies' guillotine the way his black nob rolled awa'.

"Mebbe I was a wee bit careless after that. For in the light o' the moon I was speirin' at the ivory palisade and mebbe I was counting hoo much they'd bring, for they were auld tusks, when on a sudden I had the warning o' the slither o' feet and another braw laddie was on me.

"The first lunge and he nigh had me wi' his spear, for I felt the hot breath o' the blade as it passed under my left armpit as I lifted my twa hands wi' Her on high. But he was off like a frog under a cat's paw, and I after him.

"Then he wheels, drops on his knees and jabs at me upward wi' a wee bit dirk they carry. Hoo he missed I ha' no idea, but I do mind well that the young cateran could fight.

"He leaped sideways and came back at me like a she leopard, and when I let Her

go She looked like a ring of blue flame in the moonlight, and there was this bit of a lad jumping in and out for a' the world like a lass wi' a skipping-rope.

"I had to get the puir body, but I couldna resist playin' wi' the lad. For what would he be king, I mind asking maself, forgettin', as a body does, that I had a drought for the same liquor maself! Roond and roond the huts She drove him like the angel driving auld Adam.

"Ou aye, and I ha' no doobt that in these drunken moments I thocht maself Gabriel wi' the sword o' God. Ye ha' these loony ideas when ye're drunk, as mebbe ye've noticed. And mebbe again 'twas no' maself that drove the puir laddie, but Herself the beloved o' Roberrt, King o' Scotlan'. Mon, but I laughed until the puir galoots mus' ha' thocht I was fu' as mebbe I was, for I knew that She and I could ha' driven the whole clan o' 'em and a'.

"When we were come aroond the cirrcus wi' yon gate i' the back o' him I thocht tae maself to drive him the way the lad had come and mebbe he'd ha' the sense to roon an' tell the folk. It's on'y the powerrfu' ha' the strength to be merrcifu', ye ken.

"But no, he'd ha' none o' it. Wi' his back to the gate he found he could na longer jump like a wildcat. He tried to rush me. She took him as She took the firrst king body. Ehh, mon, but the feel o' it as She bites through the warrm flesh and the bone and a'!

"But no sooner was he doon than fra the shadow o' the tusks came another galoot—his brither, I make no doobt. I was no' tired, ye on'erstand, but he came that quick that before I had time to think what I would be doing wi' the lad She had ta'en him."

His great fist came down upon the anchor-fluke.

"BEGAD, upon the top o' the second came anither! The laddie had to go the same road, and upon him came others.

"Mon, but 'twas grand!" he reiterated once more. "I no' mind hoo many bluidy corpses there were when the dawn had come, but I do mind that I slipped o'er the bluidy mess I had wrought and that I was weary. For I leaned against a great hoary tusk which was the lintel o' the gate and, sobbin' wi' the joy o' it, cried for more to come. Ou aye, just as Roberrt must ha' done mony a time in the gate o' a keep.

"But there were na mair. And I was kneeling wi' Her before me in a kind o' a dwam, for I could na dance as aforetime, ye on'erstan', when the sun blazed o'er the sudd tops."

His cigaret described an arc of red fire over the stanchions of the poop and his hand closed affectionately upon the handle of the great sword. I could almost feel the glitter of his eyes as the motion of his head against the stars indicated that he was looking at me.

"And de'il a one ever came again throughout the month o' the moon; for ma name had gone abroad, ye'll on'erstand, and none i' the land had a belly for mair o' the kisses o' the King o' Scotlan' and o' Dakko. . . . For a week or more mebbe, save for the wee bit fowls and sheep an' milk they sent not a one came nigh, but from the yammering going on awa' over in yon village I knew they were having the orgies preparatory to sowing the crops and generally acknowledging me as king.

"I'd ta'en a hut for maself, but the lassies no' seemed to think that it was the right thing to do. But as I ha' told ye I'm no' a lady's man. The women cooked ma food an' the slaves brought it to me, and a local kind o' wine which was no' so bad as liquor, ye on'erstand. I tried to haver a bit wi' 'em, but they were sae scairt o' the new king that I had deefficulty in getting sense out o' 'em.

"Onyway I found out that as king I could never again leave the ceercle o' the ivory tusks. What for no'? Because if I did the Nile would be drying up and nothing would ever grow again. There the king body had to stop until he was killed by the next successful candidate.

"But what was puzzling me was why on airth they ever found a loon who wanted to be sich a fule. The on'y reason I could discover was—notoriety, and the sake o' having a guid time while ye may. Loony? Ou aye, but there's many o' us whites air just as loony, ye ken.

"Aweel, after they'd done wi' the dancin' an' the skirling o'er in the village a deputation came to see me. I was dozing, I mind, when the yammer they started in ma ain kaleyard told me that something was on. I came out to find some half a dozen o' the elders—chiefs and wizards, ye on'erstand—

crouching in the sand on their bellies. And begad on a second luik I saw that each and ev'ry one had had his right lug carved off just the same as ma ain!

"I asked the galoots for what would they be doing sich foolishness, and I on'erstood that whatever happened to the king body or whatever he did they had to do too! And as I was talking to 'em whenever I tuik a swig o' wine stuff—for it was awfu' hot, ye on'erstand—if they didn't mimic the motion o' ma elbow! It got on ma nerves sae much that I began to laugh, and sure enough they must needs make noises as well; for a native canna laugh as a white does, ye ken.

"Aweel, after speirin' roond and haverin' wi' the slaves they crawled awa, and as soon as they were gone the lassies set up the death howl, and when I would ask them for why was the lamentation I learned that because they'd found no favor in the sight o' me the king that they would have to be slaughtered one an' a'.

"Mon, but I hadna thocht o' sich a fiend's trap, ye on'erstand. I couldna leave the bodies ta be kilt like so many sheep. Yet what the de'il could I do?

"AFTER a lot o' haverin' I learned that these heathen mix everything up. I mean, to them, as I've told ye, the bravest man must be the king because upon him depends the airth and the sky, so the stronger he is the greater chance he has o' holding 'em up.

"The puir bodies mix up the marriage of the king wi' the vegetation and the cattle. That's for why they give him the choice of a' the bonnie lassies in the land. They think that the more braw and the better children he produces the greater correspondingly will be the quantity and quality of the crops and cattle. Eh, mon, but I was that fashed that I didna know what I would do.

"A' the day and the night they kept up the death howl; and in the morning came again the one-lugged elders, bringing wi' 'em some dozen or more young lassies—from ten to fifteen mebbe. Fra these was I to choose! I on'erstood that if none o' these young queans pleased me, the king, then they too would be slaughtered. Mon, but I began to regret that I was a king.

"I tried to tell 'em that I was a bachelor born, which they couldna on'erstand, for to them there was never such a man! Then I pointed out that if they went on like that they'd have to slaughter a' the lassies in the length and breadth o' the land. This seemed to worry 'em a deal. But no matter, they considered; although they'd never had such a fule o' a king, that the laws and taboos, ye on'erstand, forbade them to do aught else.

"Mon, but I was at ma wits' end. I saw too that I'd never be able to get away wi' ony o' the ivory. Hoo the de'il could I alone? But as I told ye it was no' the ivory that had brought me there, but—aweel, ye ken, I think.

"Hooever, there was I, squatting against the door o' ma hut wi' this bunch o' one-eared de'ils—they'd no extra love for me causing 'em to sacrifice a lug apiece in ma honor, ye on'erstand—mimicking everything I did, wi' a dozen or more lassies like a herd o' antelope behind 'em; and awa' in their huts in disgrace were the other puir souls yammering their way to Kingdom Come.

"At last the on'y thing I could think of was to abdicate. I said so. But the kingship and the body was the 'until death us do pairt' marriage-service business.

"What was a body to do? I luiked at Her lying there in the bright sun beside me and, thocht I, I'd take Her once again in ma twa hands and find a bluidy end. What for no'?

"I could ha' fought ma way through yon gate and into the open, but once I was there I would be hunted by the whole pack; for a king, it seems, who steps without the gate on to common land endangers the whole universe and in the interests o' the worrld has to be killed as quickly as mebbe. And I had no stomach to be hunted like a rat.

"If I could get out at night secretly I thocht I could make a break awa' doun the river and mebbe pick up yon Suliman. But then I found out that the black scut had given me up for guid a while back and had gone with the guids and a'. I couldna marry the whole gang o' lassies, for the Kirk o' Scotland, ye ken, is no' polygamous—and 'twould no' be right for a Roberrt Brruce to mate with black heathen, ye ken. And anither thing I saw was that the matter had to be settled there and then, for they would begin the slaughter that night.

"I'm no' a man for the lassies, as I've told ye," he commented reflectively, "but often I've heard an' I've read that the mair

trouble a mistress causes a mon the mair he loves her. Mebbe aye an' mebbe nay; but a' I know is that that's the way wi' Her.

"I MIND hoo She lay tae ma hand as we held yon *shauri* in the sun. I was sair perplexed. I'd a' the mind to die in anither bluidy fecht, but no' a mind for ta be kilt like a wee bit bunny in a hole. Yon's no' a man's death, ye on'erstand.

"But I couldna have a' the lassies in the land slaughtered for ma sake, as ye'll well ken. But hoo the de'il I was ta dodge the trouble She'd brought me i'd no idea until a chance remark fra the chief body, an auld, auld lad wi' a wee bit white beard, gave me a lead.

"Ye must know that yon elders o' the tribe were in their hearts as sair perplexed as I was. Right willingly they'd ha' carved me up to settle the matter, but they'd no' dare touch the king save according to the laws o' the taboo. Ou aye, they would ha' done so wi' joy and gladness. For no mon likes to ha' to shave off his lug to please anither.

"And as well, ye must know, if I the king continued to be sae pairticular they would be compelled to be murdering their ain daughters and what not; and moreover as long as the king wouldna marry de'il an one in the tribe dare marry either. Small wonder they'd no love for their new lord and king.

"Aweel, as I was telling ye, the remark o' the auld one brought oot the fact that if the wives o' the king complained that he couldna complete his conjugal duties then, as the growth o' the crops depended on the number o' children the king body could produce, the taboo caused him to be walled up alive wi' any wee lassie he thocht fit to choose for his wife in the speerit land. I'd no mind to be walled up alive, ye on'erstand, wi' any lassie or by maself, but the thocht came to me that mebbe I could find a way oot o' suicide for maself and of massacring unlimited women.

"The whole point appeared to be whether the fault o' production, vegetable, animal and human, lay wi' the ladies or wi' the king. If the king took over the fault then he had to suffer the penalty as I've told ye.

"I luiked at the one-lugged leaders squatting in the hot sand and I luiked at Her gleaming blue, and I felt the kiss o' Her on ma fingers' tips; and mon, I was sair tempted! Yet, thocht I, if I go out hoo the de'il's going to satisfy the drought o' Her? It was a' the same, ye ken, as when I took the kingship, for then wi' Her there was no question; but noo 'twas the end bluidy or the life to ha' many anither bluidy fecht mebbe.

"Aweel, I told 'em that the fault was mine and that I'd take ma medicine as provided by the king's regulations.

"Mon, but the native's no' given ta writing his heart upon his ugly physiog, but those black scuts sitting there luiked aboot as pleased as a Leith Walk publican wi' his revoked license regranted by the Liquor Board. And, laddie, they lost no time aboot it; for, as I learned, unless the condemnation was effective, as ye might say, before the fall o' night the dozen or so o' ma official wives would ha' had to go to Kingdom Come. And forbye to those auld crows they were a row o' braw and bonnie lassies, O! as Robbie Burns would say.

"Before I had made ma abdication, ye on'erstan', I'd cannily found out which would be the hut. 'Twas near the ivory fence. Without more ado the wizards began a sort o' fumigation o' ma cenotaph, and I was forrced ta choose a puir wee soul who was sae scairt she could scarce speak. She'd no mind, nor maself, to be a bride in the speerit land, ye ken.

"By the time the sun was hanging o'er the sudd tops a' was made ready for ma funeral. The auld one himself showed me hoo I'd ha' ta sit on ma hinderpairts wi' the wee lassie's head resting on ma knee.

"One o' the black de'ils wanted to pairt Her fra me, but I'd none o' it. What, I asked 'em, would I be doing in the speerit land without ma sword? That got 'em, for it appeared 'twas the custom ta bury a mon wi' his weapons for exactly the reason I had tauld 'em.

"In the wee hut they walled us in wi' swamp mud and papyrus-stalks and then set up the de'il o' a yammer outside a' the night long. They'd no' put a morsel o' food or water, and they expected us to sit in that holy poseetion till we became ghosts; and I make na doobt that ither king bodies ha' really done it, for ye ken the native is far more scairt o' the demons o' the taboo than o' juist dying."

One bell clanged out somberly.

"I dug a hole wi' Her, for the groond, as I had ta'en care to see, was saft, a sort o'

river silt, and the leetle noise I made was well covered by the funeral sairvice going on outside, ye on'erstan'. Forbye the lass was that scairt o' the taboo that if I hadna promised ta take off her head wi' Her she'd no' come at a.' . . .

"There's na mair ta be tauld. The next night while the yammering was louder than ever we wriggled under the ivory fence and crawled awa'. Once she'd gotten o'er her leettle inconseesteney she was a' for finding a canoe, and wi' it we slipped doun the river.

"I left the young lady wi' a tribe away back, she very glad to be there and they very ta'en wi' her looks, which was mair than I was maself."

He ceased to stare at the sea. The snoring of some fat Levantine impinged upon the quiet above the rhythmic throb of the engines. He slipped lower down on the deck, resting one arm on the anchor-fluke and fingering the handle of the sword with the others.

"Aweel, laddie, I'm o'er sleepy the noo. Mebbe we'll carve another kingdom and mebbe we won't. Guid night ta ye."

Author of "Partnership," "The Weight of Reputation," etc.

IT ONCE was said, and since has been repeated times without number, that true marriages are made in heaven. This proverb, whatever its measure of cunning, has maintained against the challenge of time; and it would be crass impudence to attempt to refute its wisdom. Be that as it may, the phrase is to the point here only in reflective contrast; for if true marriages are made in heaven true partnerships are made in a place exactly opposite.

The two processes are vastly divergent. Whatever be the efficacy of the fine ethereal fire in blending the soul of man to the soul of woman, it is quite insufficient when two men are concerned. That the steel of man and man be rendered molten and welded together a sturdier flame is needed. That is a task for the devil's own red fire.

THE word had gone round that the end was near. For a week or more, in fact since the rumor had come that "Cod-Liver-Oil" Haines was trekking back into the valley, the denizens of the vast forest stretches drained by Whip River had been guardedly discussing the impending crisis. Always guardedly and always when it was certain that their words would not reach the ears of "Mister" Lumpus O'Day.

In the village of Whiptown, which sits upon the wide meadow at the bend of Whip River, opinion as to the outcome was markedly divided. Many said that a killing was unavoidable; others held it would result in a mighty battle from which the victor would emerge to claim the hand of McDonald's lass and the vanquished

would forever hold his peace; some merely shook their heads and guessed that —— would be popping.

Betting ran high, and no offer languished for a taker. Odds were neither asked nor given.

Cod-Liver-Oil Haines and Mister Lumpus O'Day owned rich timber claims back in the hills. They had taken up their homesteads within the same week; and when their cabins, three miles apart, were completed and curtains were hung on the front windows Cod-Liver-Oil Haines had baked a great batch of his justly famous biscuits and, formally calling upon his neighbor, had presented him with a round two dozen.

The very next evening Mister O'Day had cut his hair, shaved, polished his boots and with equal formality returned the social compliment, presenting the other with a gallon demijohn of his favorite high-proof whisky imported at remarkable cost from far-away San Francisco.

Now Cod-Liver-Oil Haines was inordinately proud of his ability to cook biscuits, and Mister Lumpus O'Day was no less vain of his reputation as a connoisseur of fine though treacherous liquor. Wherefore by this exchange of things so close to the heart of each the future would seem to hold a friendship which should effectively combat their mutual loneliness through the long forest days.

A week later, however, the two homesteaders sat in at a poker game in the rear of the Whiptown Bar; and by three in the morning Cod-Liver-Oil Haines had most of his neighbor's chips stacked before him, and Mister Lumpus O'Day had imbibed more bar whisky than mere congeniality demanded. From unsteady eyes he watched the last of his chips being neatly piled before the other, and with a short, hiccoughing laugh remarked:

"You're sure an or'n'ry hard critter, Cod-Liver-Oil. Second time lately you gouged me. A week ago you ruined my stomach with biscuits harder'n ce-ement, and tonight you——"

The complacent smile was struck from Cod-Liver-Oil Haines' lips, and he rose to his feet with as much dignity as his half-fuddled senses would permit.

"Ce-ement biscuits!" His deep voice fairly trembled. "Why, you young scalpion, didn't you try to poison me off altogether with your dirty bootleg whisky?"

Mister Lumpus O'Day staggered to his feet, upturned the table and with it tumbled toward his neighbor.

While it lasted it was a very free battle. Of rules there were none; anything went and much did; and by the time the combatants were forced apart Cod-Liver-Oil Haines sustained a broken nose and Mister Lumpus O'Day had expectorated two teeth.

So the trail which had been started between the cabins in the hills was quickly overgrown as no further social amenity was exchanged between the two neighbors. Each settled down to the solid business of hating the other; and for a year Whiptown waited. Then one Spring day Cod-Liver-Oil Haines appeared in the village under pack and announced that he was taking a trip to the outside for an indefinite period.

He remained in Whiptown only long enough to make a single round of his old haunts and to bid McDonald's lass goodby. She cried against the lapel of his mackinaw and promised to make her decision during his absence and give her answer upon his return. He measured her finger with a bit of string, kissed her briefly upon the forehead and rode away down the trail that leads finally out of the land of big sticks.

When, therefore, two months later the news reached Whiptown that Cod-Liver-Oil Haines was returning to the sawdust land Whiptown looked upon the whirlwind courtship of McDonald's lass and Mister Lumpus O'Day and shook their heads as they made their bets.

ON THE evening that Cod-Liver-Oil Haines' brown gelding galloped up the trail many who had bet the other way admitted it looked like a killing. Whiptown saw Haines draw up before the McDonald home and fling himself to the ground with vast eagerness. At the gate he paused a moment to explore the depths of his mackinaw pocket; then as if satisfied he went on up the garden path and a moment later disappeared indoors.

Whiptown waited expectantly. Families sat out upon their doorsteps discussing the possibilities of the situation for excitement. The bar was overcrowded, and although within its doors no direct reference was made to the affair it was foremost in the minds of all.

At eight o'clock Mister Lumpus O'Day entered through the swinging doors, drank a single four-fingers of whisky, scowled over it to indicate a connoisseur's disdain for bar liquor and was about to depart when some one casually mentioned that he had seen Haines ride into town. O'Day went back to the bar, drank again and with evident greater relish, then took a seat at one of the poker tables.

At eight-thirty the swinging doors opened and Cod-Liver-Oil Haines strode into the bar. He went about the room shaking hands and exchanging pleasantries. His accustomed casualness was wholly intact; not by a single word or look did he betray tension.

He came finally to where O'Day sat, stepped close to the chair and, bending over, said in a low voice:

"Want to talk with you, Mister O'Day. Let's go outside."

In silence the occupants of the room drew about the two, forming a solidly massed circle. O'Day nodded casually, glancing back to the cards in his hand.

"Sure, Haines. Just a moment until I play out this hand."

Cod-Liver-Oil Haines straightened up and a grating quality was audible in his deep voice.

"I don't wait on any man, Mister O'Day; so I'll say it here and now."

Mister Lumpus O'Day laid his cards face down upon the green-covered table and, pushing back his chair, rose to his feet. He faced Haines directly and his set jaw matched in steadiness the protruding jaw of the other.

To the onlookers it was a moment pregnant with satisfaction for those curious ones who relish the spectacle of men's souls close to the surface.

"Just what is it, Cod-Liver-Oil?"

"It's just this, Mister O'Day. These woods hereabout ain't big enough to hold both you and me. One of us is going out, either by the trail—or the other way! Understand?"

Mister O'Day grinned, but the expression subtracted not at all from the smoldering hatred in his eyes.

"That's all right, Haines. I don't care which way you go!"

Cod-Liver-Oil Haines eyed the other steadily.

"It ain't me that's moving on," he replied. "So I shoot at sight, Mister O'Day."

"Exactly," concurred the other.

Cod-Liver-Oil Haines bowed with vast formality, then swung about. The crowd which had gathered around them fell back to clear a passage for him to the door. His footsteps pounded through the breathless silence. The swinging doors wheezed plaintively as they fanned shut.

Mister Lumpus O'Day resumed his seat and picked up his cards. The game went on. The onlookers gradually eddied to the far side of the room; wallets were everywhere in evidence; money was handed here and there. Those who had wagered against a killing cheerfully paid their debts. They knew, having heard the word, that it was only a question of time—a short time—before one or the other would fall.

II

IT WAS past midnight when the forest service lookout in his cabin on the summit of Bald Peak was awakened by a rolling barrage of thunder which seemed to take his meager abode into vicious jaws and shake it in a frenzy of elemental passion. He leaped from his blankets and groped his way into the adjoining room whose broad front windows overlooked Whip Valley.

Cupping his hands about his eyes, he pressed them to the window panes. The sky was flooded with a lowering black mass which seemed to possess infinite depth and from which at short intervals staggering lances of lightning zigzagged earthward to bury themselves in the soft, green forest-bosom stretched beneath.

The service man shook his grizzled head as he went back to his bunk.

"The devil's own night," he muttered. "In the dawn the smoke will be curling her hair out of the fir tops down below!"

In their respective cabins among the foothills far below Bald Peak, Cod-Liver-Oil Haines and Mister Lumpus O'Day lay awake upon their bunks, harking to the battle of the elements which scarcely matched in bitterness the savage fury in their breasts.

A particularly vicious bolt sprang from the black arc of the sky and hurtling earthward struck with a trembling explosion that rocked the cabins upon their foundations. Cod-Liver-Oil Haines rose upon

his elbow and shook a clenched fist in the direction of the adjoining homestead; and Mister Lumpus O'Day, turning in his blankets, flung a withering oath across the intervening timber.

In her home down on the river McDonald's lass slept sweetly.

DAWN broke clear and sharp with a high, steady breeze fanning the face of the timber. The forest service lookout on Bald Peak made out several smoke curls and two open fires. He located them upon his instrument and telephoned the directions to the rangers in the valley below. The machinery of the service moved at once with well-oiled simplicity; a force of fire-fighters was summarily impressed and with equipment slung upon their shoulders began the march into the foothills.

Like a red satanic tongue the fire crept over the low ridge and just after dawn Cod-Liver-Oil Haines, as he sprang from his blankets, saw the ruddy glow through the low morning mist. He ran from the cabin, struggling into his mackinaw, and ascended a rise to the rear of his clearing which commanded a fuller view of the blaze.

The fire was creeping down through the timber where his land joined Mister Lumpus O'Day's. As he studied the scene he realized to his dismay that while the conflagration barely skirted his neighbor's stand of timber it had eaten deeply into his own. Yet even as this thought was in his mind his roving eye caught sight of a second red tongue far upon O'Day's land, traveling parallel with the fire upon his own.

For the moment he quite forgot his personal loss in the realization that some of O'Day's finest timber stood in the path of this second fire. He exulted, laughing deeply, and shook his fist in the direction of his neighbor's cabin.

In Indian file the impressed fire-fighters wound up into the foothills with the service men at their head. The rangers made a swift survey, orders were called back and forth and without further ado a cordon was flung about the red monsters.

Mackinaws and shirts were thrown aside and the woods echoed with the work of defense. Steel clanged against steel, the hollow clap of axes sounded, men swore and sweated, and a wide fire-trail was slowly forged through the wilderness.

It was killing work. The stoutest of bodies protested the Herculean effort; the deepest of nerve systems writhed under the strain of racing against the hissing onrush of flames. The high breeze carried the hot breath down upon them; men gasped as they drove their tools. Three stripling youths carried water-buckets from Little Creek, which for a mile or more formed the boundary between the two homesteads. The fire-fighters drank sparingly with a wisdom dearly bought; and if one succumbed a bucket was emptied upon his head.

For uncounted hours the struggle continued, then the two ends of the firetrail met and were made one. A limited guard was posted to patrol it; and the main body was withdrawn to begin a second line of defense against the chance that the first might not stay the onrush of the red cavalcade.

The second fire-trail had scarcely been laid out by the service men when the guard came straggling back. Despite their efforts the fire had leaped the trail and was fast climbing into the tops.

The gray-faced service men went forward and presently returned looking more dejected than before. The fire was in the tops; of small use a second trail now. Nothing less than a change of wind could be relied upon to save the timber.

Cod-Liver-Oil Haines, his ax hanging across his shoulder, toiled up the boundary of his timber claim. His ears had grown numb to the constant hiss and roar of the fires that were rising like red tides to engulf the fruits of his toil. His way led him between the two fires, and although they were far enough apart to afford him safe passage yet each cheek was scorched by the billowing waves of heat from either hand.

To the north and to the south he could see the fire among the tops. He knew that hope was vain now; and the only cheering thought that eddied through his dazed consciousness was that Mister Lumpus O'Day was suffering a like disaster.

O'Day wouldn't be able now to marry McDonald's lass! Nor would he himself, although this deducted not at all from his pleasure at realizing O'Day's discomfort. It meant years more of lonely sacrifice, living like a hermit afar from human companionship. An involuntary shudder passed through Cod-Liver-Oil Haines.

Then abruptly he halted in his tracks, the ax slipping from his shoulder, and whipped swiftly about as if expecting to face a mortal enemy. He stood without movement for a full minute, every sense alert.

Very slowly, as if fearing treachery, he raised his hand to his mouth. His tongue strayed out from between parched lips and wetted the palm. Then he raised the hand aloft, palm forward. His breath came unsteadily from his lungs, his face burned far more fiercely now, but from internal rather than external fires.

He lowered the hand slowly, nodding to himself, and rubbed the dampened palm with his other hand. His chest rose and fell rapidly above his inner excitement. His eyes grew wide with wonder. The wind had changed.

He stood rigid in his tracks, scarcely believing the miracle which in an instant banished his black despair. To either hand the fires still raged, but now the one to the north sounded louder as the new wind bore down upon him. Again he wetted his hand and again the truth was asserted.

Cod-Liver-Oil Haines drew a handkerchief and mopped his hot forehead. His eyes blinked owlishly as he struggled to realize the full significance of that which had come to pass. It was only a question of hours now and the red tongues would be withdrawn from the great timber; the new wind would drive the flames back upon the areas already burned over and lack of fuel would halt their blighting progress.

The hot wind from the north grew uncomfortably heavy and, shouldering his ax, Haines started on toward the point where he should be able to pass from between the two fires and into the open. He made his way slowly, deeply engrossed in thought, not wholly recovered from the reaction which had followed the spectacle of his fears replaced almost in an instant by utter complacency.

There was little to fear now. His timber was safe and so, more or less, was Mister Lumpus O'Day's. At this thought his brow furrowed and his black eyes smoldered. For the instant he almost wished the wind handn't changed, if only to have destroyed the timber of Mister Lumpus O'Day!

He was presently aroused from these thoughts by the stinging heat that came billowing upon him directly from the front. He stopped, peering ahead throuhg the grove of lordly firs. He glanced about to make sure of his direction. He was not off his course, yet the heat directly before him seemed to grow more intense at the passage of each moment.

A mild panic seized him. Fire to either hand he could understand and accept with a degree of equanimity, but fire ahead spelled imminent physical disaster. He broke into a short run but at every foot the heat increased.

He brought up again sharply. Through the broken vista directly before him he saw the spreading red glow.

There could be but one explanation. The new wind had driven the flank of the northern conflagration ahead at great speed and it had joined with the southern fire. His passage was very effectively shut off.

Remained but one avenue of escape. That was at the very opposite end of the unburned space between the fires. He whirled about and in no small panic ran swiftly back the way he had come.

His panic grew at every step. He was appalled at the possibility that the other flank had likewise joined. He knew the encircling tendency of timber fires, and if that had happened he was ringed about by a red circle that would grow constantly smaller until at some point the flames would come together, leap skyward in a mad spiral massing, and the circle with whatever it contained would be no more.

He ran swiftly on, panting heavily as the hot air burned his throat and parched his lips. He paused a moment where Little Whip Creek crossed his path and kneeling down drank sparingly. As he waded across the stream he slipped upon a mossy rock and was flung headlong into the water. He rose dizzily and staggered dripping up the opposite bank.

The heat grew to bitter intensity and he veered his course to the southward. His wetted clothing steamed voluminously. Perspiration streamed from every pore of his body. His eyes burned maddeningly.

Abruptly he came to a stumbling halt. Fifty yards ahead a man lay sprawled upon the trail. His face was contorted with pain, and he laboriously rubbed the calf of his left leg with both hands. Cod-Liver-Oil Haines drew his revolver at once and brought it directly into line upon the recumbent figure of Mister Lumpus O'Day.

THE man on the ground stared in quizzical amazement, though he did not cease the work of rubbing his leg. He blinked his eyes as if doubting their fidelity, then suddenly broke forth in a volley of mad laughter.

"You said you'd shoot at sight, Haines. Didn't think when you said it that things would be so that that's just what I'd want you to do. For God's sake, stop staring like an idiot and shoot!"

Cod-Liver-Oil blinked his eyes rapidly as if he too feared that his senses were making sport of him; and when he was reassured that Mister Lumpus O'Day really lay upon the path before him his revolver slowly lowered, then disappeared into his mackinaw pocket.

Mister O'Day laughed harshly again.

"I might have known you wouldn't do me the favor of shooting. Lord, I hate to think of being burned alive!"

Haines leaned forward, his dark eyes troubled, pointing an unsteady finger in the direction he had been pursuing.

"She—the fire ain't come together!"

The man on the ground nodded as he swayed back and forth, rubbing the calf of his leg.

"Just one wall of flames now. And my laig's plum busted—and I can't make it to the other end."

Cod-Liver-Oil Haines shook his head without lowering his gaze to the other.

"No use anyhow. It's joined back there, too!"

"Then its got us circled," Mister O'Day muttered, continuing with added spirit. "Ain't it a —— of a death for a man to die! Why the devil didn't you shoot!"

Haines lowered his gaze to his stricken foe.

"What's the use? Pretty soon it'll come eating up all around us and then it'll settle our difficulties for us."

Mister O'Day shuddered involuntarily.

"And they'll find our bones all nice and white when it cools off in here. And—and somebody else'll marry McDonald's lass!"

Haines grinned malevolently.

"Well, you won't get her, Mister O'Day!"

"Nor you either! Wonder who will?"

"Peterson, I guess. He seems to be third choice."

Lumpus O'Day pondered a moment.

"Wonder if he'll bring her to our funerals. Hope they don't get my bones mixed up with yours!"

Cod-Liver-Oil Haines sniffed intolerantly.

"Don't you waste time wondering about that. When the fire gets close, Mister O'Day, I'll go lay down far enough away so they won't get 'em mixed. I'll want to rest in peace!"

"——! Ain't it hot!" the man on the ground exploded.

"What do you expect—frost? Just look at that coming!"

Far away among the trees to the northwest the wide red tongue was slipping toward them. O'Day ceased rubbing his leg, the while cursing vehemently. Cod-Liver-Oil bundled his mackinaw tightly about him as if chilled.

"The worst of it is we ain't got a man's fighting chance!" O'Day muttered. "All we can do is just wait!"

"We can move on some, Mister O'Day. We'll last longer a bit further up there."

"Go on if you want to. I ain't wanting to last long in this. I wish to —— you'd lend me your gun!"

Cod-Liver-Oil scowled darkly at the other.

"I always figured you had a streak of yellow, Mister O'Day. Laying down like a common dawg!"

Lumpus O'Day, sputtering oaths, struggled to gain his feet, but his leg gave way beneath him and he crumpled drunkenly to the forest floor.

Haines stepped closer and stood over him threateningly.

"You're coming up beyond with me whether you want to or not, Mister O'Day. You're laig's busted plum bad, and for the time being I'm doing the bossing fer both of us. Understand?"

He reached down and fastened his hands beneath the other's arm-pits. O'Day fought like a wild beast cornered, the while pouring forth violent invective.

"Come on! Didn't you hear me? We got to find a better dying place than this here. Try to forget your —— yellow streak for a while. Be a man!"

O'Day's futile wrath quite drowned out for a time the roar of the encroaching flames. Exasperated, Haines reached down and twisted the broken leg sharply. O'Day collapsed upon his hands, screaming madly; whereupon Haines secured a firm hold upon

his shoulders and dragged him unprotesting over the rough ground.

For two hundred yards he struggled on, towing the awkward burden; then, exhausted, he halted and glanced about. At every point now the red glow was visible. The molten circle ringed them completely about; they had not long to wait. He lifted O'Day tenderly and propped him against the generous bole of a giant fir.

"She's all around us now, Lumpus. We aint got much longer now. Are you comfortable there? You—you know, Lumpus, it ain't right for us to die hating. I—I'm powerful sorry I called you yellow and twisted your busted laig!"

Mister O'Day nodded, searching the other's face with suddenly eager eyes.

"That's all right, Cod-Liver. And I'm—I'm sure sorry I stole your girl. You're a white man for dragging me here and sticking to me when I'm crippled!"

For uncounted moments they remained silent gasping from the increasing heat, cringing from the advancing spectre.

Cod-Liver-Oil Haines said——

"Guess I'll go over there a piece and find a good place to lay down, Lumpus."

O'Day's eyes winced.

"Don't go, Cod-Liver. I—I sure didn't mean nothing when I was talking about our bones. Stay here; my laig's kind of agonized and I want to—to hold on to you a bit!"

His words were scarcely audible above the running artillery of the red circle. Cod-Liver-Oil Haines dropped heavily to his knees beside his stricken enemy and O'Day clutched at his hand.

"Are you a praying man, Lumpus?" Cod-Liver-Oil inquired huskily.

Mister O'Day shook his head, visibly startled.

"I never did pray none, Cod-Liver!"

"Neither have I."

"Had—had we ought to say—something?

Cod-Liver-Oil gulped and nodded.

"Don't you know nothing to say, Lumpus?"

"Never heard a prayer in my life, except I've heard church folks say, 'amen'. What does that 'amen' mean, Cod-Liver?"

Haines shook his head hoplessly.

"Don't know, Lumpus. Seems though they always say it when they finish saying or singing things. Suppose it's like French Joe means when he says, '*fini*'."

Mister O'Day's lips twisted.

"If it means finished it's certainly us, Cod-Liver. We're sure amen!"

"Amen!" Cod-Liver-Oil murmured fervently.

"Amen!" Mister O'Day repeated.

FOR a time silence prevailed between them. The stricken man's tongue stole out to wet his parched lips.

"I—I feel better now that we've prayed, Cod-Liver. But I'm—I'm burning up inside. If I only had some water!"

With a gasped exclamation Cod-Liver-Oil Haines sprang to his feet and stood rigid and swaying above the crumpled form of the other. Upon his face an expression of vast wonderment and exultation vividly wrought itself.

"Lumpus! Mister Lumpus O'Day it's—it's answered!"

O'Day struggled to raise himself upon his elbow.

"What's been answered, Cod-Liver?"

"Our—our prayer!" Haines stammered.

"What?"

"Our prayer! Man, man, can't you see? When you said 'water' the idea came to me like—like a miracle!"

"You're mad, Cod-Liver! What idea?"

"Water! Little Whip Creek! It's only about a hundred yards over there. We—we can lay in the creek, Lumpus! Just put our lips to the surface. There's always a layer of good air on top of running water. And man—man, it'll be *cool!*"

Mister Lumpus O'Day threw a startled glance about at the fast encroaching ring of red fire.

"Do—do you thing we can make it, Cod-Liver?"

Cod-Liver-Oil Haines looked over his shoulder in the direction of Little Whip Creek. His face went ashen as he studied the prospect.

"The fire's almost there, Lumpus. We've got to make it—in a hurry!"

O'Day shook his head, his eyes glistening as they held upon his enemy.

"You couldn't make it with me, Cod-Liver! Go on alone. I'm about all busted anyway. You're—you're sure a white man, Cod-Liver, for sticking to me the way you have. But I ain't going to let you risk no more. And if you get out all right—give my kind respects—to the lass of McDonald's!"

For answer Cod-Liver-Oil Haines stooped over and lifted the protesting man into his arms. Unheeding the curses which O'Day instantly heaped upon him, he broke into a short staggering run toward Little Whip Creek.

At every step the bitterness of the heat increased. The hot breath from off the molten circle burned their lungs and they breathed in short painful gasps. Yard by yard they neared the running water which beckoned maddeningly to them from between cool, green banks, its glossy surface reflecting the red glow yet promising vast easement upon the mossy flat stones and soft sands of its shallow bed.

Cod-Liver-Oil Haines' steps grew jerky and indirect. He seemed to lose control of his limbs. His breath rasped perilously short from his throbbing throat.

"Drop me and run for it, Cod-Liver!" O'Day screamed into his ear. "—— you, drop me!"

Haines struggled doggedly on. Fifty feet from the edge of the creek a burning branch hurtled down from above and buried itself hissing and steaming in the water. Down the soft bank Haines plunged and brought up knee-deep in the creek. Only for a moment he paused, then crashed on down-stream to where a wide rock ledge overhung a shallow stretch of water at the creek's left bank.

Here he halted and lowered his burden into the water.

"Quick, Lumpus, crawl under the ledge!"

Even as he spoke a second burning brand swept earthward. Cod-Liver-Oil saw it coming and flung himself aside; but the flaming tip crashed upon him, lashing him full across the eyes.

With a scream he crumpled upon the sandy bottom of Little Whip Creek. O'Day already under the ledge, reached forth and with the fortitude of desperation forgot the agony of his leg as he braced himself and dragged the other beneath the rocky projection.

All about them it was cool and darkly green. Furtive trout darted wildly to safety, startled by the strange intrusion. With ears beneath the water the mad artillery of the conflagration was abruptly removed. It seemed to O'Day that they had entered upon a new world, infinitely comforting and peaceful.

He turned his head to one side and to his dismay saw that Cod-Liver-Oil Haines' lips had slipped beneath the surface. Bubbles rose madly. He swiftly raised the other's head and slid his arm beneath to pillow the lips to the surface.

O'Day's free hand crossed to the other and touched the flaming red welt which the flying fire-brand had stretched across Haines' face. Even as he watched the pulsing swelling seemed to rise until it fairly filled his eye-sockets.

Minutes later Haines began to stir. He turned his head toward the other and O'Day could see the slight movement of the flaming welt which told him that Haines was endeavoring to open his eyes. Haines' lips moved and O'Day raised his ear above the surface and thrust it close to the other.

"I can't see, Lumpus! Are you all right?"

O'Day submerged his ear and raising Haines' head whispered into his ear:

"Lay still, Cod-Liver. You sure got a bad crack. I'm all right."

For a time the men beneath the ledge lay quietly upon the sandy bottom, their lips touching the surface of the water. With a fiendish howling the fire began closing in upon Little Whip Creek.

The space between the crouching men and the circle of red flames grew momentarily narrower. A writhing, bellying mass of smoke descended upon the surface of the water. But not quite upon the surface. An infinitesimal fraction of pure air, cooled by the running water, persisted between the surface and the smoke mass, and upon this meager fraction they drew for their life breath.

Cod-Liver-Oil Haines' hand groped blindly through the water and touched the other. O'Day glanced toward him to find that his lips were again moving. He raised his ear to the surface. Instantly the thunders of the fire smote him.

"Is it—nearly—over us?" Haines gasped. "I can't—see a thing—Lumpus."

O'Day turned his lips toward the other and Haines raised his ear to the surface.

"She'll be over us in a minute, Cod-Liver. Come closer to me under the ledge. There'll be a lot of flying bits dropping now!"

With mad hissing and thundering the flames swept across Little Whip Creek. Even through the heavy smoke mass Mister Lumpus O'Day could see the vicious red glow of living fire. His arm about the other

tightened, drawing him deeper beneath the protecting ledge.

Great flaming boughs roared down to earth with crashing impacts; others fell hissing into the creek, disturbing the even surface with treacherous little waves that filled the mouths of the men and caused them to sputter and cough. A great trunk crashed to earth at some distance, its very tip lashing into the creek. The men lay tense, strained, holding tightly to each other.

Time passed, uncounted moments that seemed hours, and the red glow through the smoke began to fade. O'Day grinned and pressed the other's shoulder reassuringly. He knew that the main tongue of flame had passed over and soon would be halted altogether as it reached the areas already burned over before the wind had veered.

Gradually the heavy smoke pall began to thin; it grew lighter beneath the ledge. Still the men remained quietly upon the sand bottom; for although the running fire had passed, the woods about still burned and smoked, making human traverse of the area impossible.

Abruptly O'Day became aware that a rapid succession of tiny wavelets was washing against his upthrust lips. For a moment he pondered the phenomenon in perplexity, then raised his head and peered out from under the ledge of rocks. The surface of the creek was a maelstrom of ever-widening wave circles. O'Day broke into uproarious laughter. A torrential rain was pouring from the skies.

An hour or more later the last vestige of smoke had disappeared from the surface of the water. O'Day dragged himself painfully across Cod-Liver-Oil Haines and out into midstream. The rain descended in drenching bursts. All about the blackened woods steamed voluminously, the giant fir trunks appearing like towering ghosts in filmy winding-sheets.

He felt Haines' hand upon his shoulder and turned to him.

"Guess we can travel now, Cod-Liver. The smoke's about gone. You can walk and can't see, and I can see and can't walk, so we'll just have to stick together! My cabin's closest, Cod-Liver."

"I'll carry you, Lumpus," Haines replied. "You just steer me and we'll make it all right."

It was slow, hard going. Many were the jerky halts, wide detours, panting stops to rest. Haines made his way slowly, guided by the directions of the man upon his back; and it was late afternoon when they emerged from the blackened area. Haines paused among the living timber giants to drink deeply of the sweet air, then he toiled on, threading his way between solemn colonnades of firs, until at last he began the slow ascent of the rise upon which sat a cabin among a stand of pines.

At the door of the abode Haines knelt and O'Day slipped from his back. Then side by side they sat breathing deeply. For a long space no word was spoken. At last Cod-Liver-Oil Haines raised his hand to his stricken eyes and grinned.

"We're pretty fairly busted up, Lumpus, but we got out just the same!"

"Amen!" murmured Mister Lumpus O'Day.

III

LONG past midnight a fire burned vigorously upon the hearth of the cabin's living-room. Upon an improvised cot drawn into the glow from the fireplace lay Mister Lumpus O'Day. Close by, seated in a capacious rustic chair, Cod-Liver-Oil Haines drew deeply upon the stem of a briar pipe.

Behind them in the semidarkness the dinner table stood, still cluttered with dishes and the remnants of their meal. A crock containing ham and beans appeared by the head of the table, and beyond a platter of tall biscuits close by a large demijohn which advertised its emptiness by lying on its side.

The face of Cod-Liver-Oil Haines was crossed and recrossed by an immaculate white bandage beneath which strips of court-plaster, cushioned by cotton, held the red swelling down from obstructing his vision. Just above the edge of the bandage mere slits of eyes appeared.

Mister Lumpus O'Day turned upon the cot and removed the pipe-stem from his mouth.

"Hope the old doc comes back early in the morning to cast my laig. I've got to be getting back on my feet in a hurry; lots of work to be done since the fire. Figure you lost much, Cod-Liver?"

"Not quite as much as you, Lumpus. But that ain't much compared with the size of our claims. Anyway I always had a hankering for a good-size clearing to raise truck and some wheat. I'll have it now."

Mister O'Day nodded thoughtfully.

"That's a good idea, Cod-Liver. Guess I'll just do the same."

Haines stroked his neglected mustache with an air of uncertain wistfulness.

"Lumpus, I've been thinking its powerful lonesome in these here woods."

The man on the cot nodded ready concurrence.

"I was just thinking that, too, Cod-Liver." He paused a moment in half-abashed indecision, then plunged on: "And Cod-Liver, seeing as both our clearings will come together, let's work double, put in a fine planting and then build us a big cabin right on the boundary line! What do you say?

Cod-Liver-Oil Haines drew the pipe from between his teeth.

"You—you don't mean that, do you, Lumpus?"

" 'Course I do, Cod-Liver. And it won't be near so lonesome."

"But how about that lass of McDonald's? You'll be wedding her soon!"

Mister O'Day started perceptibly.

"Me?" He shook his head decisively. "She's not mine, Cod-Liver. She's your's! That's why I sort of hesitated about suggesting we cabin together. But—but when she comes to you I'll move back here."

"She ain't coming to me, Mister O'Day! She's sure your's!"

"No, she ain't! Didn't I act like a dawg and win her when your back was turned?"

"That's a fair game, Lumpus. And besides you're powerful handsome compared to me!"

"I—I don't want her, Cod-Liver! Can't you believe me? Honest, I'm comfortable just this way!"

Cod-Liver-Oil Haines continued to stroke his mustache.

"Me, too, Lumpus. I don't want no wife. But—but what'll we do with her?"

They smoked in respectful silence the while they pondered this delicate and momentous problem.

"Let's leave her to Peterson!" O'Day suggested with a hint of desperate timidity, glancing at the other as if fearing rebuke. Cod-Liver-Oil Haines smoked on; then he slowly nodded his shaggy head. For long minutes a silence prevailed.

"It's right comfortable here, Lumpus."

"And homelike," O'Day added.

"Let's have a drink on it."

"And the rest of your biscuits, Cod-Liver!"

Cod-Liver-Oil Haines rose and moved swiftly about the room, returning presently with two tumblers filled with whisky and a generous platter of biscuits.

Mister O'Day rose to his elbow and took a biscuit in one hand and a tumbler of liquor in the other. Likewise provided Cod-Liver-Oil Haines took his stand beside him.

"This is the best whisky I ever tasted, Lumpus!"

"Aw, it's just common boot-leg poison. But you sure can bake biscuits, Cod-Liver!"

"They're harder'n cee-ment, and you know it, Mister O'Day!"

O'Day raised his tumbler.

"Here's to it, Cod-Liver, and may we be as good partners as—as we was enemies!"

And "Amen!" murmured Cod-Liver-Oil Haines.

Presently the empty tumblers were deposited upon the floor and the men relaxed once more, gazing into the leaping red flames upon the hearth as they drew deeply upon their pipes. As the night wore on no further word was spoken, nor was further word needed; for when men go through hell together the devil's own red fire welds a bond of steel between them through which is communicated an understanding that mere words may never aspire to supplement.

The Second Mate

By Walter Mills

BUT it is a pity," said Mr. Figgis gently.

Mr. Figgis, leaning back in his stiff old chair and meditatively polishing his huge gold-rimmed spectacles, was not an imposing figure. The little back office, with its Franklin stove, its rows of file-boxes over the mantel and its piled dust in the corners, was not an imposing place. Mr. Figgis indeed is gone now, and with him his office and perhaps even the crooked street that led to it, but in 1840 there were few people in Boston who did not know the quiet old gentleman in the blue coat with brass buttons, and there were few seaports in the world where the green-and-red house-flag of Figgis & Co. had not flown from the main trucks of his tall clippers.

The name was one to conjure with in two hemispheres, and Mr. Figgis, feeling that a little, rubbed his glasses with the air of a man who controls the destinies of thirty ships and their hundreds of seamen.

Captain Herron, standing opposite to him, his high hat in his hand, felt it too, and was awkwardly deferential. He was a tall man, but with that sagging corpulence about his body that distinguishes many shipmasters who have sea appetites but no opportunity for exercise beyond what a narrow quarter-deck may offer. His eyes were much too close set, and looked out with a hard brilliancy from his very bushy black eyebrows. He answered Mr. Figgis' remark abruptly.

"That makes no difference, sir," he said, evidently growing impatient at the interview. "I won't have a first mate whom I can't trust. The *Bolingbroke* is a seven-hundred-and-fifty-ton clipper, and that's no child's play."

"Ah, to be sure, captain. I'm not trying to force the man on you. No, no. Henslow won't do. That's flat. But it's a pity all the same."

Mr. Figgis put on his spectacles and looked gravely at the other; but the captain evidently felt no particular sympathy for Henslow. The captain was a heavy man with a heavy chin and heavy lips, and did not seem to be of a sympathetic cast. The ship-owner went on—

"He's been with you for four years, hasn't he?"

"Four. And that's enough to tell me that I don't want him for a first. You know how it is, sir. Nothing against him. And a smart enough seaman; I'll say that much. But he needs a skipper over him that knows the job. He's not the man."

"You are quite right. Quite right. Let's see. This is awkward. If first mates are going to fall sick they ought to choose some other time than a week before sailing. H'm.

"I guess we'll take young Rogers out of the *Parrokeet*. He's been second on her for

five voyages. She can spare him, and a boost won't be bad for the boy."

"Very well, sir," said the captain. "Able enough. But the other one just won't do."

Mr. Figgis got out of his chair and strolled to the window, where the weak Spring sunlight was streaming through. He crossed his hands behind him and looked out at the drays rattling over the cobbles in the street below. He was in a reflective mood that afternoon, and there was nothing for it but that the captain must wait, impatiently shifting his big body from one foot to the other.

"Do you know," said Mr. Figgis, "it's mighty bad about Henslow. I don't like to turn down a chap that way, when he's been waiting for a step so long. And here I'm taking a second mate out of another ship over his head. It's a pity."

"I don't know what you're worrying about, sir. The man's no real good."

"There's nothing against him captain."

"You can say what you like, sir. But he hasn't got it in him. A skipper can always tell. And there's nothing more to it."

"Yes, yes; you are right, I suppose. But I always feel that, given a chance, that sort might somehow——"

"Oh, he's a good enough second mate, sir," said the captain who was in a hurry to get back to his ship. "But you can't take the risk with those sort. They'll go along, fair weather, all their lives. And then a blow will come on and you'll need them, and they just ain't there."

"Eh, eh. You never can tell. They may be. But you're right; can't take the risk. I'll send young Rogers over to you first thing in the morning.

"But I don't like this sort of business. Easy enough for you and me, but it's hard on the young fellows. Kill a man's hopes for success—it's no light responsibility. And when you get old, you know, like me, it seems shameful. Well, well, good afternoon, captain."

The captain went out, and Mr. Figgis pondered a while at the window.

"Yes," he jerked out to himself, "when the blow comes, you can't tell."

THE next morning young Rogers joined his ship. Walking along the crowded waterside streets of Boston, between the tall, shuttered brick warehouses that seemed just to be waking to the cool Spring sunshine that lay upon their southern walls, he felt a happy sort of pride. The *Bolingbroke* was known as one of the crack clippers of the Boston-China fleet, the darling of old man Figgis' heart, and an appointment in her as first mate meant a good deal to a young man with high professional ambitions.

The animation in the street, the thundering drays with their huge horses and profane drivers, the laborers swinging great bales of silks and teas into the big doors that opened here and there black and mysterious, the breath of the fresh morning breeze stirring out of the harbor, all chimed with his mood, and he stepped along gaily enough.

Presently, however, he came up to the dockside, and found himself opposite the bow of his own ship. The long jib-boom stretched out across the roadway far above his head, a magnificent spar, and his eyes followed the fore-royal stay up and back to where the towering truck rose into the clear sunshine above the warehouse roofs. She was undoubtedly a fine ship.

The tang of salt water came to his nostrils, mingled with the odor, strange and seductive to a lover of the sea, of the dried weed that hung upon the piles of the wharf. The ship moved a little uneasily in her berth, and the wash from a vessel passing outside sucked about her cutwater.

Rogers found himself staring at the figurehead. The wood-carver had perhaps been a little clumsy in his work. At any rate, it suddenly seemed to the young officer that Lord Bolingbroke was leering at him in an unpleasant way. He was a snuffy old eighteenth-century gentleman in a wooden waistcoat that was very much too tight for him, and he was certainly grinning.

It was a strong first impression, and Rogers had something in him of the superstition of the sea and something of the fear that had made his ancestors execute the Salem witches. He suddenly conceived a dislike for the lord, and the whole ship, as beautiful as before, yet appeared to him strangely repulsive, like an unhealthy work of great art. He laughed at himself for a fool, and went down the pier.

Coming into the waist, he found the second mate, over whose head he had been promoted, superintending the stevedores who were swinging the cargo aboard and dropping it down into the yawning main hatch.

"Good morning, Henslow," he said in as unconstrained a way as he could.

The other looked at him silently. He was a small man with dark hair and a very dry, brown face. There were fine puckers about the corners of his eyes. Many seamen have then from gazing for long times into the great empty spaces of the ocean, but somehow to this dark, sunburned face they gave a touch of the sinister. At this moment it was a little intensified.

Henslow found himself for the first time face to face with the man who had suddenly come between him and his almost certain chance of promotion. He would have to live with this man, as his subordinate, for months to come, and the thought made him suddenly angry, so that it required an effort for him to assert his self-control.

"Morning, Rogers," he said abruptly.

He felt that he must speak quickly or his words would betray him. Then he added in a perfectly expressionless tone—

"The captain's aft."

Rogers was surprized and had it on the tip of his tongue to say something, when he suddenly recollected himself. When a ship is loading in her home port it is not customary for the captain to sleep on board, as Captain Herron must have done to be there so early. The master often comes down in the afternoon to see how things are going, but he leaves the loading to his mates.

Captain Herron evidently did not trust his second officer. Rogers made no remark, but turned abruptly and went aft. He felt himself somewhat at a loss.

The captain, whom he found shaving himself in the cabin, greeted him very shortly and stared at him with his close-set black eyes. They were not pleasant eyes.

"Look sharp about you, Mr. Rogers," he said, "and do your duty, and I don't doubt but that we'll get on very well together. But there's no sogering on this ship, I can tell you, and it won't go if you try it."

Rogers did not like that. It was unnecessary, and he was a little huffed.

"You needn't be afraid, sir, that I'll not do my duty."

"Come, come, I dessay. But I don't want any misunderstandings to begin with. Get forward now and help Mr. Henslow with the cargo."

He turned back to the shaving-mirror, and Rogers went out, less at ease than before. Herron was known as a "slave-driver," one of those hard Yankee skippers that gave American ships an infamous reputation on the high seas for cruelty at the same time that they made them by their marvelously fast passages the undisputed queens of the two oceans.

Here then was a "slave-driver." Rogers had never sailed with one before.

Henslow, leaning motionless against the rail in the waist, saw Rogers come out of the poop into the sunshine and pause for a moment over the high doorsill. Between the two there stretched the long, gracefully sheered deck with the coiled ropes clustered about the masts and with the white planks checkered prettily by the shadows of the spars and rigging.

Even at that distance their eyes crossed. Henslow was disgusted with this fellow, with his tacit assertion of superiority. His presence was an insult, insistent and obvious. But what was he to do?

Henslow shrugged his shoulders and turned away. The other, as if released, shut the door behind him and came forward.

A week later they were at sea, squared off on the long, long run to the cape. They lost the great Provincetown Light in the dusk of an early dawn, and with the day they settled down to the vast emptiness of life at sea.

Things soon struck into the regular routine; day after day the waves flashing, turning and breaking about the cutwater, day after day the great sails stretching flat as boards against the blue sky. They bore steadily southward, beyond Hatteras and the "roaring forties" and into the mighty trades, and then drew under the Line and idled in the doldrums, where the paint blistered in the sun.

But the *Bolingbroke* was an uneasy ship. The captain, dark, heavy, ruthless, threw short commands from his favorite post against the quarter-boat. The crew feared and disliked him and obeyed with no real response. The officers were worried by him; but more than that, each of the mates carried his own difficulties.

Henslow could not look at Rogers without feeling that implied insult; it was something that was not to be escaped, that destroyed his self-confidence. He was forever reminded that he had been passed

over by a man younger and with less sea experience than himself.

He was stung sometimes into wondering whether the injury really was as undeserved as he felt it to be. And that made him shut himself away in his own dislike and distrust.

Henslow never said anything to Rogers, but went silently and doggedly about the decks, gave him the orders at the change of the watch as shortly as possible and sat opposite to him at meals without a word. Rogers, on the other hand, could not rid his mind of the sinister suggestion of reproach that the slight, dark figure embodied for him.

The silence was what made the difficulty hard to endure; Rogers had no way of defending himself against the second officer. It was not a pleasant voyage.

AS THEY worked southward through the doldrums the tension grew. On every passage Herron had his reputation as a fast skipper at stake, and he constantly drove his men for a record.

But on this particular trip the luck was worse than usual. The winds had never been so light and variable. The men were called again and again to swing the yards in order to catch a faint breeze that would die away in half an hour. The captain was everlastingly worrying them, and they would mutter and throw sudden black looks at the quarter-deck.

One morning Rogers was awakened for his watch in the usual way, by hearing Henslow pound on the deck above his head, but when he came up the companion ladder he saw at once that something had gone wrong. A sudden tableau confronted him. The crew had evidently just been called to man the braces; some of them were already at the pin-racks and had begun to throw down the coils. But they were motionless, looking at the center of the deck.

The captain stood there, a bloody belaying-pin in his hand, and before him on the planks there lay the figure of a sailor, a little Hingham man of Henslow's watch. Henslow stood by the wheel-box, silently looking on.

For a long moment events hung balanced, no one willing to make a move. A light breeze just stirred the ensign on the gaff.

"Lay on the braces, there!" roared the captain suddenly. "Look lively, you sogers!"

The tension was over. The men at the racks hastily threw down the remaining coils; the others ran to tally on to the braces.

"Here you," said Herron, "some one take this man forward."

And he turned abruptly and went into the poop. Rogers looked inquiringly at the second mate.

"A row," said Henslow, speaking quickly in his excitement. "No importance. Bloodletting'll probably be good for the chap. But it's a —— nasty way of handling your ship."

"The men are getting on edge," said Rogers softly, so that the man at the wheel could not hear. "I don't like this business."

Henslow looked at him a little curiously. He felt at once that this man had no right to say that. He was making an implied criticism of the captain, and it was the captain who had given him his unjust promotion. It was not a decent thing to do.

The old anger that Henslow had so carefully repressed came back over him, but he controlled himself, and when he spoke it was with the impersonal voice of a man asking a scientific question.

"How does it feel to *you*, I wonder?"

Rogers, too, seemed suddenly to appreciate the implication of what he had said, and he recognized the hard bitterness that lay behind the cold interrogation.

"What do you mean?" he asked, instinctively on the defensive.

"Taking another man's job out of his mouth. I'm only asking because I'm curious about it, you know."

"I didn't take anything out of your mouth."

"Oh, no, I suppose not. That's the way you put it to yourself. I don't blame you. Of course, you didn't have to accept the berth. But you didn't think of that; you didn't think of the way I felt about it."

"Well, what's the good of talking?"

Rogers was naturally angry, because he felt the justification of the charge. Henslow knew that there was no use in talking; he saw that he was only losing dignity in the other's eyes and in his own. He had kept silent so long, he should still have done so. Indeed, he had not intended to open the question, but now he could not stop.

"Yes," he said with an involuntary note

of querulousness that struck the first mate unpleasantly, "what's the good of talking about it to you? Because you have been jumped over the head of a man no worse than yourself it would be much better to forget about it, eh?"

"You know I can't say anything," Rogers returned rather hotly.

"Look here, Rogers, you don't know how it feels. I'm older than you; I've been at sea longer. And I've been waiting for my chance longer.

"They put Simmons into the *Elizabeth Figgis* when I was due the place. Wasn't I as good a man as Simmons? What have they got against me? Simmons turned out a drunk.

"Well, they put you in here. I tell you, I'm as good a seaman as you are, and the place belonged to me by rights!"

The dark face lost something of the sinister aspect which had troubled Rogers. The weakness in it seemed to come out about the eyes. Henslow went on:

"I suppose you're in with that old slave-driver. Yes, he's a fine captain. Almost killed that boy right here for nothing at all.

"But I'll get a chance yet, I tell you. And then you and your old brute down there can go straight to ——. I'll show you how a ship should be sailed, by ——!"

His face was working, and his voice began to rise. Rogers went over to the binnacle as if to read the course, but really so that the helmsman would be brought within hearing. Henslow saw the move and turned away down the companion.

He never opened the conversation again. But Rogers was always conscious afterward that there was a new barrier between them; Henslow had revealed himself without having intended to do so, and it was only natural that he should hate the first officer the more for having thus shown him his soul. The *Bolingbroke* drove on, day after day, carrying her cargo of human error and human misunderstanding with her.

The passage out was not a good one. When at last they had picked up the pilot outside of Hong Kong and he was conning the ship carefully into the harbor, they saw a clipper riding at anchor in the roads. Coming up to her, she was recognized as the *Wildrake*. The *Wildrake* belonged to a rival line, and the *Bolingbroke* had left her in Boston.

"You see that, Mr. Henslow?" asked the captain, pointing her out to the second mate, who happened to be standing beside him. "You're going to sweat blood on the home passage, my lad."

Henslow had sailed long enough in the *Bolingbroke* to know that he spoke the truth.

Indeed, every one rather came to dread the homeward passage, and each of the three officers would go ashore in the evenings to the seething Hong Kong streets with a feeling of intense relief. None of them had realized how much the other two had come to dominate his life until they all found an opportunity for escape.

Perhaps it was Rogers who longed for that escape the most. He was younger than the others and consequently somewhat more impressionable, and he was newer in the ship than Henslow, and found a subtler problem to face than Henslow did. Then, too, he knew Hong Kong well, and was a little better able to appreciate it for its charms than was Henslow or the captain.

The narrow, crowded thoroughfares thronged with Europeans and Chinese, Americans and Malays, strangely mingled together, the all-embracing smells of the Orient, the curious shops with their still more curious wares, the money-changers' booths where half-naked Chinamen sat clinking long rolls of silver dollars down their brown arms into big wicker baskets, the foul little drinking-shops where sailors of all nations foregathered under the flaring whale-oil lamps and became drunk and fought and swore beneath imperturbable Chinese eyes, held a fascination for him and a power to divert his mind from the two figures that had so long been his only companions.

Strangely, as it seemed to him, he felt a kind of fear of both of them. With the captain it was nothing but the natural shrinking from brute unpleasantness; that was not hard to meet, for it was a question of mere physical force and Rogers could face that with its equal.

But for Henslow he had a different feeling. The silent second mate had asserted a power over his life; Rogers felt in him an unknown quantity that had somehow a direct relation to himself; it lessened his self-respect, put him continually on the lookout for he knew not what.

The man disgusted him a little, and mystified him a little, and could not be

altogether forgotten. Rogers never went about with Henslow in the evenings, he never saw him in the streets, but the brown face with the wrinkled eyes would come into his mind time and time again.

Indeed, it was something of a mystery where Henslow went in the evenings after the officers had nodded good-by to each other at the wharf. But each successive morning found him on board and, with Rogers, bending all his energies toward filling up the great empty hull of the *Bolingbroke*.

And each successive day found all of them just so much nearer to the time when the *Bolingbroke* would batten down her hatches and hoist the blue peter for the long run homeward. Then they would all be cooped up together, and there would be nothing but one silent watch after another, and endless days of that vague tension which is bred by mutual dislike and mutual distrust.

AT LAST the full cargo of fragrant tea-bales was under hatches, and the covers were put on and secured. It was a fine, fresh morning when the crew at last went on to the forecastle head and manned the windlass-brakes. The anchor came short, the top-sail yards rose majestically into place, and the *Bolingbroke* walked down across the sparkling harbor with the gray mud from the anchor-flukes soiling the clear water, and the spray just beginning to rise from the forefoot.

But as they passed the *Wildrake* the sound of a full-voiced chorus floated to them across the intervening distance, and they could see her crew carrying the long bars around, while the figure of the chanteyman, mounted on the capstan-head, stood out plainly. She, too, was getting under way, and every one on both ships knew that there would be a race, a race worthy of the great annals of the American clippers.

The captains exchanged faint hails that seemed to hang for an instant in the clear air, and then a fresher gust came up, the top-gallants and royals were sheeted home, and the *Bolingbroke*, heeling gently over, left the harbor behind. Rogers, coming aft from his place on the forecastle, knew that his long trial was fairly begun.

If the crew had been uneasy on the passage out, things were much worse now. Captain Herron had a reputation as a fast skipper and a hard man, and he seemed determined to justify it. The defeat which the *Wildrake* had given him spurred him on, and he drove his ship and the men in her without mercy all the way across the broad southern Pacific.

The crew felt his severity and became restive under it; orders were obeyed with a scowl, the snap and spring of a smart ship were missing, and everything that was done was done under compulsion. The mates could help very little, for the captain was constantly on deck, and if he thought their commands were unnecessarily gentle he would reenforce them with his own.

Henslow was careful to make it seem that he did not mind this interference; he showed the same repression and the same disregard for everything about him, no matter what was going on; but for Rogers the great, ungainly figure, always leaning in the weather mizzen shrouds and making it impossible for the mate to control his watch in his own way, was a source of almost unbearable annoyance. It added to the discomfort of this wretched ship, and he liked his job less than ever.

It was during the first long leg of the voyage that the remembrance of the sinister manner in which the wooden figurehead of Lord Bolingbroke had affected him came back strongly. He heartily wished that he had never become a first mate.

They met weather even worse than usual as they drew up to Cape Horn. The head winds were impossibly bad, and Captain Herron fumed and worried. The Straits of Magellan were of course out of the question, and they had before them the long, hard beat to the southward around the Cape.

There they ran into furious gales; the ship was twice thrown on her beam ends; the crews were tired out. But the captain never relented; he was constantly calling all hands, or keeping them on the deck while he carried a dangerous press of sail so that they would be ready to furl it in a pinch.

Once, after they were through with the worst of the bad weather, the captain knocked a man down as he had done before. Both the mates were sorry that it had happened. The crew were in a worse temper then before, and things began to look very ugly indeed. Rogers and Henslow felt the added tension, but neither would give voice

to a sneaking fear that was forming in the backs of their minds.

It was inevitable that the climax should come. One afternoon a young chap from Boston, a fine-looking fellow who was ordinarily the most inoffensive of creatures, unguardedly answered the skipper when he flew into a rage at him for some small failing.

Captain Herron lost control of himself entirely, and ordered that the man should be made a "spread eagle" of. He was triced up in the main shrouds, and the captain himself laid the lash on his bare back. The rest of the crew stood grouped sullenly about the foremast in absolute silence.

It was Rogers' watch. When the captain was through, and the man, with his back raw and torn, was at last taken down, the first mate spoke to Herron.

"The men are restless, sir. Don't you think you're being a little hard?"

Herron's face went from red to white.

"I tell you, Mr. Rogers, I'll take no advice from you. If you want a lesson too, by —— you'll get it!"

There was nothing more to say. When Henslow came up Rogers told him what had happened.

"Eh? That's bad."

Henslow was too worried to keep to his rule of silence.

"Watch them," replied the other. "I don't like it. You can't be too careful."

Rogers went below to get some sleep. At the end of the watch he awoke to hear the whole crew on deck, fiddling with the sails again.

He went up hastily. Henslow was in the waist looking after the trimming of the foresails. The captain was on the poop, leaning over the rail, with his hard eyes on the unwilling men.

"Set the top-gallants, Mr. Henslow," he ordered suddenly.

Henslow repeated the command. But the men evidently had the memory of the "spread eagle" fresh upon them, and their resentment was ominous. They moved slowly.

"Jump there, —— you!" yelled the captain.

The sailors sullenly began to get into the shrouds. Herron swore, ran down the poop ladder and along the deck toward the men.

Instead of hurrying the faster they all stopped where they were. One had just taken hold of the shrouds.

"When I tell you to jump, you *jump*, d'y'understand?" And the captain struck him between the eyes.

He staggered back. The captain turned to the next man and raised his fist. The sailor almost unconsciously closed his hand about a belaying-pin in the pin-rack beside him. In an instant he had whipped it out, and before any one had really taken in what was happening Herron lay sprawled upon the deck, and a dark pool of blood was spreading from under his head along the white boards.

The sailor stood over him, looking foolishly at the end of the pin, which was sticky, and dripped. He had hit harder than he had thought.

Rogers started forward. That first movement broke the spell. A light-haired Norwegian yelled out suddenly in his clipped English:

"Get them! Get the whole —— afterguard!"

The crew made a rush. Neither mate had a weapon handy; they both sprang back and into the poop, slamming the door after them.

THINGS came to a pause. The men had evidently stopped. The two officers in the cabin felt the *Bolingbroke* come up, tremble in the wind, and fall off again. The helmsman had deserted the wheel.

Henslow and Rogers looked at each other, breathing hard. The wrinkles about the small man's eyes puckered curiously. The whole affair had been too horribly sudden, unexpected. Neither could collect himself or grasp the full situation at once.

"Close squeak," said Henslow with a dry mouth.

"Rather. The captain?"

"Dead. Knocked in the side of his skull. Mutiny."

He went to one of the small windows in the forward bulkhead and looked out. Rogers followed. Herron was lying alone in the waist, his arms clawed out in a ghastly fashion. The men had withdrawn again to the foremast and were talking together excitedly.

Rogers looked then at Henslow. He suddenly began to wonder just what sort of a man this really might be after all, upon

whom he might have to rely for his very life.

He realized that in all these silent months he had come to know hardly anything about him. Henslow became a tremendously vital enigma to him, utterly insoluble. The vague distrust that he had felt before came back strongly.

Henslow abruptly left the window and went into his own cabin, rummaged there for a few moments and then returned. He was holding a pistol in his hand.

"At least," he said nervously, "we've got this."

"That won't do us much good. We can get one of 'em. But one won't stop a rush."

Henslow tried to get hold of himself, but his hand trembled a little.

"No," he said; "and then——"

He made a gesture. His meaning was clear enough to the other.

"Look here!" cried Rogers. "Pull yourself together a minute. We've got to go carefully."

"What are they jabbering about there? Why don't they come for us?" Henslow demanded.

An idea suddenly burst upon Rogers.

"Don't you see? Of course! They've got to keep some one to run the ship for them! They can't afford to do us up. There's not a man there that can make a reckoning."

"Eh?"

Henslow recovered somewhat. It was perfectly clear. The crew had mutinied; but without a navigator they would be hopelessly lost. Then another idea struck him.

"But they can't take us back to Boston. We'll inform on them. They won't trust us not to."

"But anyway we're safe for a while, I think," Rogers answered slowly. "We'll have to see what they are going to do."

The reprieve was a tremendous relief, even if it was only a reprieve. The two men leaned against the bulkhead. Everything fell very silent in the cabin, and the noise of the sea rushing along the outside of the hull came to them.

Henslow blinked his eyes. The fear of death was strongly with him; his nerves were cruelly jangled.

He looked at the other. The crew needed only one of them for navigating the ship. It would be easier for the men to keep a watch on one than on two.

If they should decide to kill one of the mates, it would certainly be Henslow. He knew that. The idea was horrible.

He felt the pistol still in his hand. The air in the cabin seemed to grow close; Henslow felt a giddiness coming on. He made an effort against it.

And then everything seemed to stand out with intense clarity in his mind. The whole situation: Rogers there, and himself, and the mutinous crew that depended for their lives upon one or the other of them, but not upon both. Until, when they came to shore, they would all be branded as mutineers and the officer who should bring them safely home would have them hung like murderers.

Like murderers! He started. Everything stood out clearly in his mind.

"What are they doing now?" he asked abruptly.

Rogers moved to the window. As he turned his back Henslow raised the pistol and shot him—the smoke suddenly filled the cabin, stifling and sickening. Henslow threw open the door and rushed out on deck. The men looked at him, astonished.

They stood that way for a moment. Henslow made a fearful effort to keep that clarity of thought. He stepped forward.

"Well," he said, "I'm your captain now."

"We ain't got no captain," said the Norwegian dully.

The others were dumfounded. Henslow looked at them.

And then he realized how spontaneous the mutiny had been. The sailors were as terrified at what had happened as if they were already in the criminal court. They were facing each other like children frightened at having done something bad.

"See here," said Henslow. "I'm the only officer left now. I'm your captain. The less said about all this the better. The captain and Mr. Rogers died of the fever. So if you're wise you'll turn in like men now and get the ship out of irons."

But they did not move.

"You'll peach on us in Boston," said the boatswain darkly.

"Do you know what I've done? I've just murdered Mr. Rogers in that cabin. You heard the pistol, didn't you? You see it here, don't you? You're all witnesses.

"Well, if I inform on you, you can inform

on me. And the other way around. So hurry up and get to work, and we'll sail the ship smack into Boston harbor, so nobody'll ever know the difference."

Slowly the men grasped the full significance of the situation. Every one was safe.

The one thing that they wished above all was to undo what had just been done. That was impossible, but here was certainly the next thing to it. They all stirred in their positions like men suddenly released of great burdens beneath which they had been held motionless.

"All right, Jarvis," said Henslow to the helmsman. "Get aft now, and look sharp."

Jarvis broke away and ran aft. The others jumped to the braces, and in a few minutes the *Bolingbroke* was on her course again.

Henslow walked on to the poop. And then that brittle clarity of mind suddenly smashed into a thousand pieces, and he saw for the first time what he had really done. He leaned against the poop rail.

THE *Bolingbroke* came up Boston harbor as stately as a cloud, with a record passage to her credit. Henslow really was a smart seaman, and the crew had turned to with a will to wipe out the memory of the mutiny. The pilot asked how long they had been out, and when he heard he whistled and shouted congratulations.

But the dark, silent man on the quarter-deck did not look as if he were to be congratulated. The pilot, seeing his haggard and broken face, asked him if he were ill.

"No," said Henslow, "though there's been sickness on board."

And then he had added irrelevantly—"I almost wish that I was."

And people noticed that after the crew had been paid off they never talked about their great passage, as seamen generally do.

MR. FIGGIS was sitting in the inner office, as dusty as ever, behind the same big desk, when Henslow came in. He sprang up and went toward him.

"I congratulate you, young man!" he cried. "What a record! Of course, Captain Herron is partly responsible, but you've done nobly, nobly. With sickness beside."

And the old gentleman rubbed his spectacles vigorously.

"Yes, sir. I think you had better lay the credit to the captain, though."

"Well, well, we'll see about that."

He paused.

"You know, Mr. Henslow, I was mistaken in you. I'm sorry for it, and I wish to make my apology."

Henslow looked earnestly at Mr. Figgis.

"No, sir," he said; "you were not. Do you mean about that appointment as first mate? I realize why you didn't give it to me. I never knew before, but I have found out."

"Eh? Nonsense! I don't know what you are talking about. Mr. Henslow, I'm going to give you the ship. You've deserved her. What do you say to that?"

Henslow leaned heavily on the desk. Here was the chance; here was success. A captain at his age! But he had prepared himself for this.

"No, Mr. Figgis; I'm sorry, but I don't deserve it. I know that now. I can't accept."

"What? Foolishness!"

"And besides I'm going to leave the sea entirely. But I thank you very much."

"Leave the sea? What do you mean? Where are you going, then?"

"I don't know, Mr. Figgis. To ——, perhaps."

And Henslow left the room. Mr. Figgis leaned back in his chair and rubbed his glasses.

"No," he murmured, astounded; "you never can be sure."

A Whizzer on Willer Crick.

A Complete Novelette

By W. C. Tuttle

Author of "Alias Whispering White," "'Hashknife'—Philanthropist," etc.

THE longer I inhabits this vale of tears, the more I believe in the saying, "Honesty is the Best Policy." A feller may get awful lonesome and all that, but he don't have to wear his holster tied down and take his drink with his back to the bar.

I don't want you to get the idea that me and "Hashknife" Hartley are bad *hombres*, 'cause we ain't—not so awful. We don't make a practice of throwing rocks at cripples and we haven't a single mortgage on anybody's old homestead.

Taking it by and large, there ain't many folks who can point their finger at "Sleepy" Stevens and Hashknife Hartley and say—

"You're wanted some place."

But at that it don't take many pointed fingers to make you feel that you should have growed up according to the Golden Rule, went to Sunday-school more than one week before Christmas and educated yourself to be a harness drummer or a hotel clerk.

Hashknife is just a long, thin, angular, hatchet-faced *hombre* with a perpetual grin on his face. Some time or other he's been red-headed and freckled, but the desert sun, Dakota blizzards and Montana alkali has faded it until he's just a roan. I won't brag about myself, 'cause I'm telling the story. *Sabe?*

I found an old newspaper one day when me and Hashknife are working for the Triangle A outfit over on the Flathead. I'm digging under a bunk after a short piece of rope when I unearths this old sheet, and something thereon seems to catch my eye.

It shows some pictures of bucking broncs and fellers bull-dogging steers, and the center picture shows a silver-mounted saddle, all scrolled up with fancy jiggers. The top of the page shows this line:

WHERE DID THEY GO?
RIDERS BUCK OUT OF SIGHT AND LEAVE COVETED TROPHY

I takes the paper out where Hashknife is putting a new *hondo* on his rope and sets down beside him. His cigaret sizzles his mustache before he gets through reading it, and then he nods his head and goes back to work.

"She must 'a' been some hull," I observes.

"Yeah. Cost a hundred and eighty bucks, Sleepy. Saddle-maker told me that he didn't make a cent on it. You've got to pay big for all that fancy scroll stuff, and there must be a heap of silver in all them ornyments."

"Nobody knows where they went," says I. "Just bucked out."

Hashknife scratches his nose and peers at that *hondo*.

"Thank ——! What folks don't know won't hurt 'em, Sleepy."

Just to wise you up a little, I'm going to let you in on a little happenstance. The towns of Yolo and Pecos ain't far apart.

Yolo is the county seat, the same of which is the place where the sheriff holds forth. Pecos holds such a wayward reputation that the sheriff stations a deputy there to keep as much peace as he can get his hands on to.

A feller inhabits Yolo for a few days—feller who rides a pinto horse. He's wishful to buck a game of chance, but soon finds out that they're cinch games. He rises in his wrath and proclaims he's been gypped by said crooked pastime. Naturally there's a few interested parties who objects to having their morals paraded, and they rises to the occasion—too late.

The rider of a calico bronc relieves 'em of their visible supply of worldly goods, exchanges lead compliments with the sheriff and fades out of Yolo with the sheriff on his trail.

Simultaneously a rider of a calico horse goes into a bank in Pecos and takes what's in sight without leaving any security, and he fades out with the festive deputy in pursuit.

Now, these pinto riders don't know each other, but they meets in the mesquite, asks and answers a few questions, sends a few hunks of lead on their back trails, and fades down a coulée while the overanxious sheriff and his hired killer lays out there in the brush and heaves lead at each other.

It's natural that the sheriff holds a grudge against them two after a dirty trick like that. In due course of time them two bad, bad men gets rid of their pinto broncs and decides to go the straight and narrow way. They works honest-like to get enough money to buy a pair of horses and gets them lifted from the corral the first time they rides to the town of Wisdom. Said thieving operation leaves them on foot, and they casts around for another chance to be good—if possible.

The town of Pemberton is pulling off a round-up show; so me and Hashknife ships our rigs up there. Hashknife can ride anything you can cinch a hull on to, and what he can't ride he turns over to me. Uh-huh, I sure can ride.

If my head was as educated to the twists of business as my legs are to the twists of a bronco I'd be packing the Standard Oil company for a pocket-piece.

Me and Hashknife circulates around until we finds an Easterner who is willing to pay two hundred and fifty dollars for the prize saddle, and then we enters the bucking contest. It is supposed to be for the world's championship, the same of which she ain't—not by several good riders who are too poor to come that far.

Anyway, they handed us some regular outlaw broncs, and we got all the jolts that buckaroos are heir to, and the crowd seems to appreciate it a heap.

Things goes along for three days with a lot of perfectly good riders dragging their saddles back to the stable. The top riders are getting fewer and fewer and the broncs tougher and tougher, until we sudden-like realizes that we're all that's left.

Hashknife and Sleepy rides for the championship. It don't make no difference who wins, 'cause we splits that two hundred and fifty anyway.

They decides to have us ride the finals together. Hashknife draws El Diablo, a roan outlaw from Wyoming, and I gets Gray Wolf, a hammer-headed man-eater from Idaho. They're a educated pair, if you asks me. They've got just one idea in their empty heads, and that is to have nothing on their backs but hair.

It takes four men to keep Gray Wolf's feet on the ground long enough to cinch the hull—even with a blind over his eyes. Hashknife's helpers are having the same kinda trouble.

We're saddling in front of the grand stand, where the crowd can see all the fun. I steps in beside my animal, slips my foot into the stirrup, and for a moment I looks at the crowd.

Man, I plumb forgot that I was going to ride for the championship. I swung into that saddle all humped up, catches that other stirrup, yanks the blind and slams the spurs into Wolf before he has a chance to get set.

HE JUST makes one whale of a hop, and lights running. I seen Hashknife go high and handsome, and then my animal bucks right into him. Lucky for us that neither horse went down. As we came together I yelps one word at Hashknife, and then set my spurs into that gray outlaw.

I don't know what the crowd thought. Gray Wolf sailed across the rail of that racetrack like a bird, took a slant at the outside fence and tore down about fifteen feet

of it. The boards are still in the air when I looks back, and here is Hashknife right at my heels, and that Diablo animal is running like its namesake was hanging on to its tail.

There's one nice thing about an outlaw bronc—he don't quit. We just set there and rode. It took about five miles for either bronc to grab a deep breath, and then they just grabbed it and started all over again.

We must be about ten miles from Pemberton before we stopped. There ain't nobody behind us. It would take airships to find us in that hump-backed country, so we relaxes on the backs of the two worst horses in the world—supposed to be—and rolled smokes.

"You sure it was him?" asks Hashknife.

"Think I don't know that long, stoop-shouldered, wolf-faced *hombre?*"

"Well, well!" says Hashknife. "Who'd a thunk he'd be there? But I reckon it's a good place to look if you're hunting for some certain puncher, Sleepy. Did he know you?"

"Well, he didn't wave at me—if that's what you mean. He was right in the front row, and I seen him stand up to let somebody pass."

"Quite a ways from Yolo," observes Hashknife. "Yes, sir, she's quite some ways. I don't know how we ever made our getaway on these buckers. Ordinary-like we'd still be in that arena, wishful but ashamed to pull leather. I reckon it's just luck that we got a pair of outlaws that felt it was their day to race instead of buck."

"Uh-huh," says I. "Come what may, Hashknife, we're horse-thieves, and may the Lord have mercy on our luck hold out."

"Amen. Where do we go now?"

"Well," says I, "they tells me in school that a straight line is the shortest distance between two points. Pemberton is due west; so if we goes due east we will eventually arrive at the longest distance from Pemberton, which contradicts the theory, but which is a glaring fact. What do you think?"

"My ——, don't ask me, professor. We better cinch up a little, 'cause these broncs are liable to get back to their original ideas, and I ain't no pe-destrian—me."

Hashknife is musical. When he's thinking deep-like he often raises his voice in song, which goes like this:

Everybod-e-e-e-e loves a little lo-o-o-o-vin',
Little bit o' lovin' is fine.
To a poor cowboy in a cactus lan'
Little bit o' lovin' is simply gran'.
Chasin' dogies, bustin' broncs,
Drinkin' up his money in honkatonks;
To a tough ol' rooster, no good a-tall,
Little bit o' lovin' is heaven, that's all.

"Lot of truth in that song, Sleepy," says he. "Love keeps everybody moving, old-timer."

"All but two of us, Hashknife. Love let out that contract to the sheriff of Yolo."

"That's true, Sleepy, but love laughs at blacksmiths, you know."

"Locksmiths, Hashknife. I reckon love laughs at punchers, too. She sure always gives me the merry ha, ha. You ought to get married, Hashknife. You're homely as ——, but you've got a face that nobody ever gets tired of. Yes, sir, that face of yours can be looked upon and mistaken for lots of things.

"Now, if you was married, Hashknife, and the sheriff showed up at your teepee, he'd say:

"'If there ain't Hashknife, the son-of-a-gun! Married, too! Well, well! He can't take a drink without asking his wife. She's packing his Bull Durham and lets him have half enough cigarets, and she won't let him have enough money at one time to set into a four-bit jack-pot game.

"'He'd be tickled to death to have me arrest him, but I won't. Naw, sir. Dawgone him, he's got to suffer for his sins.'"

"As a prophet, Sleepy, you're a total loss," says he. "Never mind my face, ol'-timer. I ain't pretty to look upon, but I've sure got a heart in my bosom."

"According to the laws of anatomy," I admits; "but females don't hanker to marry a man just because his insides are all in their proper places. You've got gall on your liver, too, Hashknife, and she shows a lot more externally than your heart does."

"All right; all right, Sleepy. You knows so danged much about physiology that I wonders why you ain't a doctor with a diplomy on the wall instead of being a common puncher with a price on your head."

WE POINTS east until midnight, and then stakes out our broncs and grabs a little sleep. The next day about noon we hits a ranch. There ain't nobody there but the Chink cook, but he's plenty for our needs. He's one good cook,

you bet your life, and he don't roll his eyes when me and Hashknife consumes eight eggs per each and a pound or two of ham.

"John," says Hashknife when we're filled, "where do we come to if we rides straight up that way?"

The Chink considers it for a minute.

"Maybeso you find Willow Cleek lange. Bimeby you find Wind Liver lange. Too far, I no *sabe*."

"Wind River range good place, John?"

"Pletty good, you *sabe?* Willow Cleek dam bad!"

"Willow Creek bad, eh? What's the matter—rustler?"

"Maybeso. Evelybody clousin'. You *sabe?* Maybeso bloodah, sistah, clousin. All 'lated. You *sabe?* No good."

"All related, John?"

"Betcha life! Allee time fam'ly fight. Too much clousin, dam bad!"

"All same Chinamen; eh, John?" grins Hashknife.

"Allee same ——!" grunts the Chink, which shows he's range broke. "China boy maybeso have plenty sistah, bloodah, clousin, yessah. China boy no hate 'lation. China boy he say:

"'I please hope you make plenty money. I plenty glad you get litch.' Yessah, you betchum.

"Willow Cleek he say—

"'Go to ——! I hope you get lynch fo' stealum cow.'"

"How about outsiders, John?" I asks. "No relation folks?"

"Ver' bad place. You *sabe?* No 'lation—last quick. Evelybody makeum hard to catch. You *sabe?* Dam bad lange, you betchum."

"Much obliged, John," says Hashknife.

"All lite, you fin' out. Goo'-by."

"My gosh!" grunts Hashknife as we rides away. "Don't never tell me that a Chink can't read human nature. He knowed there wasn't no use warning me and you."

"We ain't got no use for Willow Creek, Hashknife."

"Sure not, Sleepy, but she must be some queer layout. Any time a Chinaman opines a place to be *hyas cultus*, she must be worse and more of it."

We cuts across the hills until about four o'clock, when we strikes a road. Just about that time we meets a saddled bronc with reins dragging, and we sets there and watches it swing around us; never offering to stop it. All to once our ears gets this salutation:

"Of all the ignorant, imbecilic know-nothing punchers I ever seen, you're the worst. Why in thunder don't one of you imitation punchers hang a rope on that animal?"

We looks up. She's standing in the middle of the road, a hand on each hip, and glares at us. She's a frail-looking little maid, with a big mop of gold-colored hair and a freckled nose. Man, I've seen blue eyes in my time, but they're all faded looking beside hers.

Mad? Holy mackinaw, that girl is madder than a bob-cat with its tail caught in a trap.

"Your hoss?" asks Hashknife. "Belongs to you?"

"Do you see any other animal around here?" she snaps. "What in the name of ossified owls do you think I was yelling about? If that don't answer your question, Mister Long-Legs, I'll add this much—y-e-s! Now, if you're too lazy to toss a rope——"

"How'd he get away from you?" asks Hashknife, shaking out his loop.

"I was playing the piano and left the parlor door open," says she; and all you've got to do is look at them blue eyes to know she's telling the truth.

"Wait!" says she, "Maybe you'd like to know more. My name is Glory and the horse's name is Beans, and I'm seventeen and Beans is six, and the saddle was bought in Ranger. I've got a sister who married a preacher, and my pa came from Missouri, and ma is originally a Swede, and Beans was bought from 'One-Eyed' Olson, and if you don't get busy he'll be back home before you get your mouth shut."

She stops all out of breath.

"My ——!" grunts Hashknife, "My ——! Yes'm."

Hashknife is a good roper. That long boy can heave the hemp as far as the best of 'em, but Diablo ain't educated to no rope, and when Hashknife drops the loop over that runaway bronc Diablo won't stay right end to.

No, sir, that fool outlaw whirls right around and went the other way, which is against all rules. It was a good rope. She sure seen her duty and done it right.

Hashknife's latigo busted, and he sets up there in the air with nothing between his legs but the saddle.

He comes to earth in a tangle of mesquite, and Beans gets stopped so quick he turns a flip-flop. I drops my loop on Diablo as he comes past, and when the rope tightens I gets treated to some of the fanciest bucking I ever experienced. Gray Wolf came back to life and done just what the Pemberton audience figured he'd do. I reckon he'd be bucking yet, but the rope got looped around his front legs, and we comes down in a heap. Anyway we stay with Diablo, and when I got back to the road I finds Hashknife setting there on a rock, with his head in his hands.

"WHAT became of the lady fair?" I asks.

Hashknife squints at me and points off up the road.

"She—she said to tell you it was worth paying to see. Said we ought to lose our ropes and join P. T. Barnum, Sleepy."

"Yeah?" says I. "Wonder if she knows that Barnum is dead?"

"Is he?"

Hashknife gawps at me and scratches his head.

"Well, I reckon maybe she does, Sleepy. Daw-w-gone!"

We fixes Hashknife's latigo and pilgrims on up the road. Hashknife acts a heap thoughtful.

"I never in all my danged life——"

"Neither did I," says I, and Hashknife grins.

"Rampagin' little bob-cat."

"Name's Glory. Pa's from Missouri; ma's a Swede."

"Keeps Beans in the parlor," adds Hashknife. "Lucky bronc."

Then Hashknife bursts into song:

"Chasin' dogies, bustin' broncs,
Drinkin' up his money in the honkatonks;
Tough ol' rooster, no good a-tall——

"Say, Sleepy, that love thing is mighty queer. She's a heap like electricity. You don't know what it looks like or where it comes from, but she sure can jolt —— out of feller. There's the first signpost I've seen since I left Kansas."

It's an old board dangling on a drunken post at the forks of the road. The words are partly faded out, but she's still readable.

THERE IS A CLICK ON WILLER CRICK
THE WORST IN ALL THIS NASHUN.
THE HITE OF THEIR AMBISHUN IS
TO BEAT THEIR OWN RELASHUN.

"Hashknife," says I, "we are at the turning of the ways. Yonder lieth the road to Willer Crick; ahead of us lies the road to —— knows where. The Chink warned us."

Hashknife reads the poem over again.

"She speaks fluently of 'their own relation,' Sleepy. Being as me and you ain't blood brothers to the 'click', maybe—What do you think?"

"Anyway," says I, "the Stevenses never did believe in signs, and taking advice from a Chink never was our motto."

"Pshaw! Your folks and mine belongs to the same church, Sleepy."

Some gentle buckaroos leave their six-guns hanging in the barn or the house when they goes out to ride buckers, but me and Hashknife never imitated that dangerous custom; therefore we're still heeled.

Hashknife packs a .41 Colt on his hip and a .45 derringer in his vest pocket, but I takes a chance with a ordinary .44 Colt on my hip. I carried a bowie-knife once, but I was always afraid I'd cut myself, or that somebody'd take it away from me and start carving, so I threw it in the river.

I chides Hashknife a heap over that derringer. Little two-barreled cannon, which is liable to knock a finger off when it roars. I don't like 'em.

Me and Hashknife are just ordinary shots. I never seen but two punchers that was what you'd call good shots. A prospector killed one of 'em with a pick handle, and the other shot himself accidental.

We comes to a ranch-house pretty soon. A feller is setting on the steps, cleaning a rifle; so we went on. Willer Crick ain't what you'd designate as being a land of milk and honey.

Away back in the dim and distant past she got shook up and pawed over by a mighty power, which left her hump-backed to a startling degree. She's a place that's had her ups and downs, and it don't take no scientist to point out that fact.

"'Pears to me that I hears shots," observes Hashknife, stopping his bronc. "There she goes again!"

"Hashknife," says I, "you're getting nervous like a old widder woman. Ain't folks got a right to shoot?"

"I—I reckon they has, Sleepy. Oh, sure. Just wondered—that's all."

We rides down around a curve, and ahead of us we sees a ranch-house. She's sort of a tumble-down affair with a swaybacked roof. Taking it by and large, she needs a heap of fixing to be up-to-date in any respect.

We're beginning to feel the pangs of hunger, so we swings off the main road, goes through the open gate and rides up to the house. There's something beside the steps, sort of like a heap of clothes; so we rides up closer.

"Holy henhawks!" grunts Hashknife. "Corpse!"

It's a human being and Hashknife wasn't shooting very wide when he pronounced it a corpse. It's an old feller with white hair and whiskers, and he's laying there sort of doubled up over a Winchester. There's a dozen empty shells scattered around, which shows that he threw some lead before he quit. Hashknife tears open his shirt and feels of his heart.

"Flickerin'," pronounces Hashknife. "Let's take him in out of the sun."

The inside of the house is on a par with the outside. We lays the old feller on a worn-out sofy, and then rustles some water. He appears to have stopped a lot o' lead, but after we sluices him a little he opens his eyes.

He stares at us for a few seconds, and then he busts loose. Talk about profanity! Man, he could sure handle it proper. Make a feller sort of feel queer to hear a man, skidding West as fast as his heart can pump blood out of bullet-holes, cursing like a mule-skinner. Sure he was conscious.

"Who in —— are you?" he asks when his supply of words seems to run short.

We tells him who we are, an' he actually grins.

"Find me a pencil and paper," he croaks. "—— me if I don't get even! Kill me for my money—will they! —— murderers!"

"Who shot you?" asks Hashknife.

"None of your —— business! Find me that paper and pencil! I can't live long, but I'll stick long enough to get —— good and even with Albright."

I rustled a sheet of paper and a pencil, and handed him a book to hold it on.

"Now hold me up, so I can write,——it!"

He sure wrote a wabbly hand. He asks us to spell our names for him, and he chuckles to himself as he writes.

Once I thought the old boy was gone. He dropped the pencil, but I gave it to him and he cursed his weak fingers. He managed to sign a name at the bottom, and then dumped book and all off his lap.

"They lose!" he whispers. "I don't know you fellers, but by —— I've got to chance it! I wouldn't die fast enough to suit 'em; so they ——"

"WELL," says Hashknife soft-like, "he didn't suffer none. Barring his tongue, I wouldn't mind having him for a gran'paw. He sure had the constitution of a grizzly."

Hashknife picks up the paper and squints at it. It reads:

> To anybody concerned:
> I hereby states that everything I own in this world is hereby given to Hashknife Hartley and Sleepy Stevens. This means everything. I don't want anybody but them to get anything that belongs to me.
>
> Yours very truly,
> Ebenezer O. Godfrey.

Me and Hashknife walks to the door and looks around. A magpie cackles from the tumble-down corral, and from the side of the hill comes the whistle of a prairie-dog.

"Well, Ebenezer," says Hashknife, "we don't see nothing, but we'll take it. Ain't it queer, Sleepy?"

"Queer as the egg of a whangobbler," says I. "We've got something that ain't visible, Hashknife."

A wagon and a pair of mismated horses comes drifting along through the dust and stops at the gate. Two men climb down from the seat and come up towards us. They're a tough-looking pair of barber-boycotters.

"Ol' Godfrey around?" asks one of 'em.

Hashknife looks 'em over and then motions inside.

"Ain't sick, is he?" asks the other feller.

"Not now," says Hashknife.

The two men looks over the remains and then at us.

"I don't know who done it," states Hashknife. "We rode in just after the show was over."

"Did he say who done it?"

"Told me it was none of my —— business."

"Uh-huh," nods the taller one. "He'd jist about say that."

And then he turns to the other.

"I reckon Pete and Al will inherit this place, Ab, but as per usual there will be several folks to consider."

"Worth anything?" asks Hashknife.

"Considerable," nods the one called Ab. "Got a few cows and he owns a coppermine, the same of which ain't so bad. I'd take the copper fer mine."

"I've got a little paper here," says Hashknife. "You *sabe* the old man's writing?"

He folds it so all they can see is the signature.

"That's the old man's John Hancock," nods Ab. "Know it any old place. What's the idea, stranger?"

Hashknife holds it while they peruses same, which takes 'em quite some time.

"Well, I'll be ——!" snorts the tall one, scratching his head. "I reckon she's all right, proper and O. K., and nobody can dispute the le-gality, but ——"

"But what?" asks Hashknife.

"You fellers are strangers, ain't you?" asks Ab. "Yeah, I sure reckon you are. I'm Ab Wheeler, and this party is Al Bassett. We're distant relations of ol' Godfrey—very distant. We're a heap wise to this locality, and, speaking in our wisdom, I'd say to you boys: Get on your broncs and drift. Just tear up that letter and forgit it. You'd never be able to work this place."

"Maybe we can sell it," suggests Hashknife.

"Sell ——! Nobody but a Willer Cricker would consider such a thing, and Willer Crick ain't got brains enough to do any considerin'."

"Then you figures we've inherited a white elephant, eh?" I asks.

"Elephant!" snorts Bassett. "Boys, you've got a menagerie. You looks like two nice, honest boys, and we don't want to see you drift into trouble. Naw, sir. You jist mosey along, and me and Ab will see that the old man gets planted proper, and then let the Willer Crickers fight it out."

"I've always hankered to own a cow," says Hashknife innocent-like. "I never had no playthings like that."

"I'm just loco over copper," says I. "All my life I've wanted to dig something shiny out of rocks. Seems funny that we both gets just what we've always wanted, Hashknife."

"Haw! Haw! Haw!" roars Bassett, "You boys are sure funny. You'll likely do well. If you see Jim Wells over on the Wind River range you tell him I said to give you both jobs."

"According to society," says Hashknife, like he was letting 'em in a big secret, "folks always leaves a card when they comes calling. Willer Crick needs better social manners, gents; so next time you come—bring your cards."

"You're funnin', ain't you?" asks Wheeler. "Sure you are. If I was you I'd leave."

"We'll hook onto the next cyclone that comes along," grins Hashknife. "In the mean time you might tell folks about the old man. We'll wait until tomorrow morning, and if somebody don't claim the remains we'll plant him out in the front yard."

Bassett scratches his head, and the two of 'em walks out of the door.

"Well," says Bassett, "all I've got to say is this: You ain't showing much sense."

"We ought to do well here then," grins Hashknife.

We watches 'em get in the wagon and drift along. Hashknife examines that Winchester and stands it up by the door.

"Lot of shells in there on the clock-shelf," says I.

"Uh-huh. Single-shot rifle in the kitchen. Reckon she's a .45-70, too, Sleepy. We've inherited something; you know it? From what I can gather—we're going to start a scandal."

"You want to be a puncher or a miner, Hashknife?"

"I don't know yet. 'Pears to me that two husky babies like me and you ought to handle between us what the old man handled alone. Don't you think we ought to do well?"

"See what he got, Hashknife."

"That's so—but he was a relation, Sleepy. Let's pesticate around a little and see what we've inherited."

There's a bunk-house down the hill from the house. About fifty feet behind that is an old stable, and built alongside of the stable is the main corral. There's a couple of harness-marked roans hanging around the stable, and a decrepit bay mare is nosing around the corral. The animals

all branded with a Bar O on the right shoulder.

There's four bunks in the bunk-house, but no bedding, so we carries a supply down from the house. We turned our broncs into the corral and fed 'em some loose hay, and then we cooked us a meal.

WE COVERED the body with an old sheet, and then takes the two rifles down to the bunk-house. We swamped out the place until she's habitable, and then sets down on the steps to enjoy a smoke. The sun has gone down and Nature seems at rest.

Hashknife leans over to give me a light off his match, when— *Zeel Plop!* A bullet slams into the log just behind him. It's a danged good thing he leaned over.

I'd say that we hurried within, but another bullet knocked a hunk of mud from between the logs before we got under cover. Hashknife pumps a shell into that Winchester, while I loads up the old Springfield.

"Our coming has been advertised," opines Hashknife, poking out a pane of glass in the window. "If that bush-whacker——"

Another bullet rammed into a log, and Hashknife's rifle cracked.

"You better get your head down!" chuckles Hashknife. "That feller almost drew a harp that time, Sleepy."

Zam! A bullet came through an end window and threw splinters out of the wall. I slips over and peers out. A feller rises up out of the brush and makes a break to get the wood-shed between him and us. He's about fifty feet to run, and he sure hurried.

I knocked out part of the window and led him about three feet. I don't *sabe* that old cannon; so I shoots low. I reckon it took about all the sole off one boot, 'cause it knocks the feet out from under him, and he lit on his belly.

Lucky for him he falls into a low place, and all I can see is the bottom end of his suspenders and the seat of his pants. He had time to get a better place, but he didn't know I was shooting a single-shot rifle.

"Get him?" asks Hashknife.

"Made him stumble. How you coming?"

"My pro-te-jay is silent. Maybe I hit him."

Zing! I turns to see Hashknife dancing a jig and rubbing his nose.

"You didn't hit him very hard," says I.

"No, dang it! Got my nose full of slivers. Never mind my man, Sleepy; you keep your fat head down!"

I lines up my sights and gets jolted. Man, that gun kicked!

"Get him?"

"Never mind me, feller. Tend to your own knitting;" and I shoots again.

"What you shooting at?" he yelps, "Ain'tcha got more sense than to waste shells thataway, Sleepy? Why don't he shoot back?"

"Got him hypnotized. Hope the ladies stay away."

"What has the ladies—" begins Hashknife, and then stops to shoot a couple of times "—got to do with it?"

"Because," says I, "I've not only cut his suspenders, but I've plumb ruined the seat of his panties."

I turns to shoot again, but my man has turned gopher and dug himself in. Me and Hashknife sticks to our posts until it gets too dark to shoot, but the attack is over. I reckon that Willer Crick has began to respect us a little.

We hangs saddle-blankets over the windows and plays seven-up until we got tired, with two Colts, a derringer and two rifles on the table.

Hashknife is the first one to wake up in the morning.

"Wake up, Sleepy!" he grunts, kicking me in the ribs. "We've got company."

Some feller's voice is high-pitched and quarrelsome, and we can hear somebody swear pious-like. We slips into our boots and peeks out. There's three wagons in the yard, and half a dozen saddle animals are tied to the fence.

A tall, pious-looking *hombre* wearing a long black coat detaches himself from the main herd and comes down our way.

"Shake your gun loose, Sleepy," advises Hashknife. "Sometimes them pious cloaks covers plenty of hardware."

I swings the door open.

"Mornin'," says he. "You fellers named Hartley and Stevens?"

"Said to be such," admits Hashknife.

"I'm Sol Vane. I sort of does the lawin' fer Willer Crick, and it has come to my ears that you two has peculiarly inherited the Bar O outfit."

"Yeah?" drawls Hashknife. "You hear things quick."

"Uh-huh. Would you mind showing me the paper, which is purported to be the last will and testyment of Godfrey?"

"Purported ——!" snaps Hashknife. "No, I don't mind letting you see it."

Sol Vane spells it all out and hands it back.

"All upright and legal?" I asks.

He scratches his chin and peers off across the hills.

"Uh-huh, I reckon she's able to hold in court but fer one thing."

"What does that happen to be?" asks Hashknife. "Here's the will, and up there in the ranch-house is the body of the man who wrote it."

"Nope," says Sol Vane serious-like. "The body ain't there—that's the —— of it."

"Ain't there?" gasps Hashknife. "Ain't there?"

Sol Vane shakes his head.

"We'd admire to know where it is."

Me and Hashknife horns right through the crowd on the steps and goes inside. There is the sofy, but the body is gone. Even the dirty sheet is gone.

An old pelican who ain't got no front teeth cackles like a hen and enjoys himself a lot.

"That's —— queer!" snorts Hashknife, and then he turns to the crowd.

"Say, Bassett, you and Wheeler saw the body yesterday."

"Naw, sir," lies Bassett. "We jist took your word for it."

"Didn't think you'd lie about——" begins Wheeler, but Hashknife whirled and looked at him, and Wheeler stopped.

"Seems to me there ain't nothing to argue about," states a rat-faced young feller who looks like he needs a entire new set of brains to make him even half-witted. "Uncle Eb's gone out on the range some'ers, I reckon."

"Sure," adds another of the same type, only this one has had his nose busted and the tip of it points at his off ear. "He'll show up pretty soon."

"What's your name?" asks Hashknife, looking at the rat-faced one.

"Godfrey—Pete Godfrey. Whatcha want to know fer?"

"Your name's Albright, ain't it?" asks Hashknife, looking at Broken-Nose.

"How'd you know?" he grins.

"He said he'd get even with you," grins Hashknife.

"Who did?"

"Ebenezer Godfrey."

The crowd stares at us and then at them two. I'm nervous. There's too much hardware on that bunch. Pete Godfrey sort of crosses his feet and leans against the wall, and I happens to look at his feet.

"Better get them boots half-soled, Pete," says I, pointing at 'em. "A .45-70 sure does harrow a man's material sole as well as his spiritual one."

I misjudged Pete. He flattens against the wall and streaks for his gun. Dang the luck, I was scratching my chin when I made the remark, and wasn't looking for no gun-play.

MY HAND hadn't dropped halfway to my gun when my ear-drums almost got busted, and I sees Pete drop his gun and stagger against the wall hanging on to his arm.

I turns my head and there is Hashknife with that little derringer in his hand and a grin on his face.

"Sleepy," says he slow-like, "if I ever hear you say one word against that little cannon of mine I'll throw it away and let you take the consequences."

Pete looks like his stummick hurt him a heap. He stares at that little two-barreled thing and licks his lips. The crowd seemed too shocked to do anything but stare.

"Everybody outside," says Hashknife, and they went out like they was trained to it.

"Now, folks," says Hashknife, "there has been enough dirty work done around here. I think I know who shot the old man, but that ain't proof. We're his heirs—me and Stevens. I can't see why in —— anybody would steal the corpse.

"Sol Vane, you say you're a lawyer. Does this affect the will in any way?"

"We-e-e-ll," drawls Sol, "I'm 'fraid she does. 'Pears to me that you and your pardner are the only ones what have seen the de-ceased, and you've got to prove that the old man is dead before you can collect on the will. Right now your will ain't worth nothin'."

That old toothless walloper cackles again, and Willer Crick began to move on. Some of 'em fixes Pete's arm, and then him and

Albright rode away together. Sol Vane watches everybody ride away and then he leads his horse up to the porch.

"You fellers better take a little advice from Sol Vane," says he. "I'd advise you to move on. You must 'a' been mistook about that corpse, and even if you wasn't —" Sol's voice sinks to a whisper—"there might be some what has the opinion that maybe you fellers had a hand in—you know what I mean?

"Trouble means business for Sol Vane, but he ain't no hand to see young fellers git into trouble when he can steer 'em right. What does you think?"

Me and Hashknife looks at him, and then at each other.

"Any other questions you'd like to ask?" says Hashknife.

"Yeah," nods Sol. "I'd like to have you tell me where I can git me one of them vest-pocket guns like yours. They're sure dingers. You hit Pete in the arm and it shook him plumb to his heels."

"I don't know where you can get one," says Hashknife. "I had a hard time getting this one. Lot of fellers in my country carried 'em, but I had to kill seven men to find the caliber I wanted."

"Seven?" says Sol thoughtful-like. "Huh! Well, don't say I didn't warn you."

We watched him ride away, all humped up in his saddle.

"Did all seven of them men have derringers, Hashknife?"

"Shucks! If you can't run a whizzer one way, Sleepy, run it another. I didn't want to tell him I got that gun in a pawnshop in Frisco. If it ever comes to a showdown, Sleepy, kill Sol Vane first, 'cause he's the brains of the outfit."

"Well," says the voice of a mockingbird behind us, "are you fellers too scared to run or has somebody swiped your gentle little ponies?"

Leaning against the side of the porch is Glory. She was sort of grinning at us with them big blue eyes, while she slaps the side of her skirt with the barrel of a Winchester carbine.

"Heavenly angels!" gasps Hashknife. "Howdy!"

"Still wearing your mouth open, I see," says she, walking around and setting down with us. "I came over to see the remains."

"Whose—Godfrey's?" I asks.

"Nope—yours. Willer Crick decided that the best thing to do was to hang you both on that old cottonwood down there."

"My ——!" gasps Hashknife. "You—you came over to see our remains? Sorry to disappoint you, ma'am."

"Don't mention it," says she sad-like, and then:

"See that magpie down on that corral post? Watch."

She cuddles the butt of that gun to her cheek, and Mister Magpie fades to a handful of dirty feathers. She yanks another shell into the chamber, slips one out of her pocket and crams it into the magazine.

Hashknife looks at me and draws a deep breath. She's the first female we ever seen that could shoot straight and also have foresight enough to refill the magazine.

"How does it happen that you wasn't here with the crowd?" asks Hashknife.

"Maybe it was because I—I couldn't do any good here."

"You missed seeing Pete Godfrey get his arm drilled," says I.

She sets up straight and stared at me.

"You dud-drilled his arm?"

"Not me—Hashknife."

"Why in the name of —— didn't you——"

The little spitfire glares at Hashknife like he'd done her a injury.

"Now, I—I— Why did you want me to kill him?" stammers Hashknife. "You got anything against him, ma'am?"

"Ye-yes! I've gug-got to marry him—darn it!"

"Oh-h-h-h-h!" gasps Hashknife. "Is that all?"

"That rat-faced—" I begins, and then asks her pardon.

"Go ahead," says she. "When you get through saying mean things about him I'll start in. I know more about him than you do."

We sets there like three buzzards and contemplates the landscape.

"Ho, hum-m-m-m!" says she weary-like.

"Ever try sleeping for it?" asks Hashknife.

"If you had to think about marrying Pete Godfrey—" says she slow-like, and I changes the subject.

"Was you related to old man Godfrey?"

"Kinda. My father was a cousin to his stepson's brother-in-law, or something like that."

"My ——!" grunts Hashknife. "That's figuring pretty fine."

She nods and puckers up her forehead.

"That's easy beside some of the relationships around here. I've got too —— many relatives."

"Glory," says Hashknife, "tell us about it. Me and Sleepy are a pair of rantankerous buckaroos, and we're pizen mean—but we ain't related to you."

"Thank—I mean, much obliged."

She seems to think things over for a while, and then:

"Ignorance just about covers the whole thing. Years ago this range was settled by a bunch from Missouri, and they decided to make this a little kingdom of their own. They were ignorant, and in their ignorance they decided that as long as they're all related they can keep outsiders away.

"Naturally the ranches belong to the heirs, who marry into some other branch of the family, and this has been going on for so many years that nobody knows just what relation they are to anybody else.

"I reckon I've got about as few relatives as anybody on the crick, being as pa sneaked outside when he was young and married a Swede girl. They almost lynched pa."

Glory giggled and dug holes in the dirt with the butt of her rifle.

"PA KILLED two of the worst kickers, and the rest let him alone. He shows on the records as having killed two of his cousins, one uncle, a half-brother and a brother-in-law, but he really only downed two men. That shows how we're related."

"My ——!" grunts Hashknife. "If a feller only had one shell he could kill a generation. Go ahead. Get down to Pete Godfrey."

"Pete and Jim Albright are the nearest relation they can figure to Ebenezer Godfrey, so everybody agrees that they inherit this outfit. My pa and Pete's pa figured out this marriage a long time ago, and all Willer Crick thinks it's a cinch. Pete's a little, ignorant, mean, crooked—Aw, rats! But I've got to marry him."

"You can leave here, can't you?" I asks. "You don't have to marry anybody you don't want to."

"Where would I go? I'm not of age. I ain't got enough education to make a living. Willer Crick don't believe in education for women—or men either for that matter. Of course I won't have to marry Pete until he comes into possession or part possession of this property, 'cause right now he can't even support himself."

"Oh!" says Hashknife. "He's got to own this ranch before you has to marry him, eh?"

"Glory," says I, "you'll never be the blushing bride of Peter the Rat. This ranch belongs to us. *Sabe?*"

"Yes," says she, "when you find the body of Ebenezer Godfrey."

"How did you know it was missing?" asks Hashknife.

"I thought it would be," says she, "'cause I heard Sol Vane telling somebody that you've got to prove that a man is dead before you can claim his property, and if there ain't no body you can't make no claims."

"Ain't you got no sensible relation?" asks Hashknife.

"Sensible? You bet I have! I've got one uncle who had too many brains to stay around here. He hates Willer Crick and they hate him, 'cause he told 'em all where to head in at. He's got money, and he told me that he'd give me five thousand dollars for a wedding present if I'd defy Willer Crick and marry an outsider."

"Well, ——'s bells!" yowls Hashknife. "Ain't there nobody——"

"Nope."

Glory shakes her head.

"It would make things tough for pa, and—and— Well, I reckon I'll be going. I've got my horse tied in that thicket behind the cottonwoods."

"Sort of a front seat, eh?" says I.

She gives me a queer look, and drops her rifle into the crook of her arm.

"You saw what I done to that magpie, didn't you?"

And she walked down the hill and into the willows. A little later we seen her ride against the sky-line of the hills.

"Hashknife," says I, "that little kid was cached down there in the willows with that .32-40 and a lot of shells. Reckon it's a good thing that Willer Crick changed its mind, eh?"

"Daw-w-gone, I reckon it is, Sleepy. Wonder if she'd 'a' picked Pete first? She's a regular little son—uh—daughter-of-a-gun! Ev-v-v-v-v-erybody loves a little lo-o-o-o-vin', little bit o' lovin' is fine. To

a po-o-o-o-r cowboy— Say, Sleepy, I wonder if she likes music?"

"She'll hate —— out of you if she does, Hashknife. Let's get a little breakfast."

Ebenezer Godfrey must have been a nut on dynamite. It's reasonable to suppose that any man who owns a mine will have some dynamite in his possession, but there ain't no sense in a man owning half the visible supply of a county.

He's got dynamite in the barn, more in the kitchen and three fifty-pound boxes in the woodshed. Me and Hashknife looks it over and proceeds to get scared. Suppose somebody comes along and heaves a bullet into that mess? Then Hashknife rustles a pick and shovel.

"Going prospecting?" I asks, and he hands me his regular grin.

"Hook on to that pick, Sleepy. We're going to put this stuff where it won't spoil itself nor us."

Hashknife picks a place in the front yard, and we proceeds to dig. It requires some hole to plant seven boxes of that stuff, but we finally gets her all under the sod. I puts the tools back in the shed, and then I finds Hashknife with a saw and a hammer, acting like a regular carpenter.

I sets down and watches him build a cross. Then he finds some tar and an old brush, and he paints on the cross:

EBENEZER O. GODFREY. NOT DEAD BUT SLEEPING

"You going to pack that cross while you hunts for the corpse?" I asks.

Hashknife wrinkles his nose away from the smoke of his cigaret, and admires the lettering. Then I follers him out to where we planted the dynamite, and at one end of the mound he plants his cross. She sure looks like a regular grave.

I DON'T ask any more questions. We went over and set down on the porch to rest, when here comes more company. There's Bassett, Jim Albright, Sol Vane and another feller we ain't seen before.

"I didn't reckon you'd still be here," says Sol, like he was plumb sorry for us. "We-all hoped you'd take good advice."

"Ain't many human beings in the market for advice, Sol," grins the stranger, a tall, big-footed *hombre* with a lot of grin wrinkles around his eyes. I mentally wipes him out as a prospective target.

"One of the rightful heirs is absent today," states Sol, "but we've decided to take possession anyway. Mister Albright owns half of it."

"Yeah?" grins Hashknife. "Ain'tcha just a little mistaken? This ranch belongs to us."

"That paper don't give you possession," snaps Albright. "That won't stand in no law court, 'cause you ain't proved that the old man is dead. You better move on, if you asks me."

"Then what in —— are you trying to take possession for?" asks Hashknife. "Can you prove he's dead?"

"Hm-m-m-m-m-m!" Sol Vane has throat trouble.

"What you squattin' here fer?" wails Albright. "You got any rights?"

"Possession is nine points in the law, ain't it, Sol? Anyway, I want to show you something."

Hashknife leads 'em out to the mound of dirt, and each of them spells out the epitaph.

"That's a lie!" howls Albright. "You never found the body——"

"Well, well!" grins Hashknife. "You know there is a body?"

Albright gulps and kicks a clod of dirt.

"Somebody get a shovel," says Sol. "We'll see about this."

Hashknife straddles the grave and drops his hand down on the butt of his gun.

"No diggin', folks. The epitaph shows the contents. To all intents and purposes the body of the old man is planted here, and here he stays until you produces a corpse that looks more like him than this one. *Sabe?*"

The stranger sort of grins, and darned if I don't think he half-winked at me.

"You mean that we can't dig up this here body?" asks Sol.

"For a lawyer," says Hashknife, "you sure catch the meaning awful quick."

"Wh-where did you have the body hid?" asks Albright sort of weak-like, and Hashknife grins in his face.

"We didn't hide it, Albright, but we know who did."

"You're bound to buck Willer Crick, are you?" asks Bassett. "You won't listen to sense?"

"When I hear some—yes!" snaps Hashknife.

"We-e-e-e-e-ll," drawls the stranger, "this ain't getting us no place. These fellers seems to sort of have us on the fence."

"Aw ——!" roars Albright. "Part of this ranch belongs to me, and I'm going to have what's mine!"

"Has there been any investigation over the killing?" I asks.

"No-o-o-o," drawls Sol. "No, there ain't yet, and I'd advise you fellers to move before it starts. Ain't that good advice, Sillman?"

The stranger scratches his chin and sort of nods.

"Yeah, I reckon it won't hurt 'em none, Sol, but as Glory always says:

"'A man is either a wise man or a fool, and neither will take advice. The wise man thinks he don't need it, and the fool knows —— well he don't.'"

"Girls get queer ideas," says Sol. "I don't like to see girls traipsin' around, packing a rifle and ——"

"Glory is my gal!" snaps Sillman. "I don't need advice about her, Sol Vane."

"Don't get touchy, Jim," soothes Sol. "Everybody likes Glory."

"Aw ——!" snorts Albright. "We came here on business, and gets into a woman argument. Sol Vane thinks he's a lawyer! Lawyer ——! Leave it to me and we'd settle this danged quick."

"That's a fact," grins Hashknife; "but you better keep your head down, Albright, 'cause a .45-70 makes a goshawful corpse."

They gets on their horses, grumbling among themselves, and we watches 'em drift away up the road. As soon as they're out of sight Hashknife races for the corral and throws his saddle on Diablo.

"You stay here and watch the ranch, Sleepy," he yelps at me, and him and that roan outlaw went down the hill and off up that gully like a streak, while I stands there with my mouth wide open.

It's about two hours later when Hashknife shows up. He's got his big grin working overtime, and when he sees me he laughs out loud.

"I knowed Albright was worried about that grave," says he, "so I cut across country and watched him leave the rest of the bunch. He sorts of loafs along, with me keeping out of sight in the washouts.

"Once he stops and watches things for quite a while and then points straight for an old prospect hole on the side of a hill. I'm where he can't see me; so I shoots into the air. He swung his bronc the other way and rode plumb to the next ridge before he stopped.

"He sets there for a long time and then starts back. I shoots again, and he sneaked over the hill. I got up on the hill and watched him disappear. He didn't know who was around there, and he was afraid to make any bad breaks. *Sabe?*"

"Well, Angel Face, what was it all about?" I asks.

"Old Godfrey, you ignoranamous! Albright and somebody—likely Pete—swiped the corpse, and when we showed 'em that grave—blooey! He wanted to get away as soon as possible to see if we lied.

"Sure, I found the body. They hid it 'way back in that old tunnel. I removed same, hung it on my bronc, and I'm betting that if they ever find it they'll have to go some. Whoo-o-o-ee! I sure had some time, Sleepy.

"Now he'll sneak out there to see what we done, and when he don't find the body—Well, Sleepy, we may not be able to keep this danged outfit, but right now we've sure run a whizzer on Willer Crick."

"Glory's paw ain't a mean-looking *hombre*," says I. "I thought that him and the law shark was going to have words."

"I reckon he can take care of himself, Sleepy. Mind staying here tonight and guarding the place? I'm going up to see Glory."

"Is that a fact?" says I. "Well, well! Ain't it funny that we both gets the same idea at the same time?"

"We can't both go, Sleepy. Somebody has got to watch the place."

"All right," says I. "We'll cut cards."

Hashknife cut a jack and I got the seven of clubs. That pot-hooked card with the seven puppy-tracks always was a Joner to me.

"God be with you, Hashknife," says I. "But remember this: Me and you ain't in no position to marry anybody. Neither one of us could buy a breakfast for a hummin'-bird, and also remember that we're liable to have to mosey along any old time."

"Yeah, I know, Sleepy. Still, you'd never think to tell me that if you drawed the jack and me the seven."

I sets there on the porch and watched him drift away, and hopes I never see another seven of clubs.

THEN I glances out towards the gate and here comes Glory.

Man, I kissed that seven-spot and put it in my hat.

"Where's your pardner?" she asks as she ties her bronc to the porch.

"Said he was going to call on you. Left a while ago."

"On me? Ossified owls! Does he know where I live?"

"I don't reckon he does, but he'll find it, Glory."

"Did he go up the road?"

"Uh-huh."

"Saddle your horse quick!" she snaps. "He mustn't go there! They're— Willer Crick is holding a meeting at my home. Don't you *sabe?* They're going to come down here and— Say, are you going to get that horse or will I have to?"

That fool Gray Wolf ties himself in a knot, and I has a hard time riding straight up with a loose Winchester in my hand, but I made it. I got him lined up the road and away we went.

"Never pulled leather!" I yells at her proud-like.

"Fool!" she shoots back at me. "Never take a chance unless you're paid for it."

Right then I figures that she can boss me any time she wants to. No girl who rides like that, talks like that and can pick off a magpie at seventy yards is a clinging vine, but in this country—vines don't do well a-tall.

We hammered off up that road for about two miles, and then swung down a lane off the main road to a clump of trees. We slips off our broncs and ties 'em to the fence. We can see the dark outlines of the buildings, but there ain't a light showing on that side.

A loose bronc tries to pass us, but I threw my hat at it, and it swung in beside my horse. It's Hashknife's El Diablo.

Then Glory led me in behind the main building. From there we can see a light through an open window.

"I've done all I can," says Glory. "Them folks in there are relatives of mine, but remember this: I didn't pick 'em. Also remember, Willer Crick will shoot."

"Glory," says I, "I'll remember. Much obliged."

The window is only about waist high; so I gets almost as good a view as though I was inside. Reminds me of the big Injun councils that my dad used to tell me about. Hashknife is setting against the wall roped to a chair, and he sure shows signs of having made things unpleasant for somebody.

Pete Godfrey is there with his arm in a sling, and he looks mad enough to do most anything. Sol Vane is doing the talking, which is the natural thing for a lawyer, I reckon.

There is about twenty men in the place. Sillman is standing with his back against the door, smoking a long pipe.

"I can't see any reason fer taking a vote," states Pete. "We're all agreed on it anyway. It's a dead open and shut that they killed the old man and hid his body. I moves that we surround the place, smoke the other killer out and hang 'em both."

Just then Albright comes in. He's pale as a ghost, and I feels that he's come straight from that prospect hole. He sees Hashknife and his lips curl like he was going to snap at him.

"Well, what's been said and done?" he asks.

"We've decided to go after the other feller, Jim, and hang 'em both," states Pete.

"Now you're beginning to show sense," grins Albright. "What you waiting fer?"

"Just a moment, boys," says Sillman. "This ain't a civilized way of doing things. This feller ain't had no say a-tall. 'Pears to me we ought to hold some kind of a court.

"All this talk of hanging ain't no good unless a man's guilty, and they sure never had no cause to kill old Eb. How could they kill him and still have a signed will?"

"Likely scared the old man into it," explains Sol Vane. "They just rode in, forced him to write it and then shot——"

"Just a moment," says I, and the bunch whirls towards the open window.

They can't see nothing but the muzzle of that .45-70.

"Mister Sillman," says I, "will you please cut my pardner loose? The rest of you stand plumb still."

They never made any move while Hashknife gets cut loose.

He stretches his arms and grins at the crowd.

"Sol," says I, "give him back his derringer."

Poor Sol wanted to keep that little gun, but he also wanted to keep his being; so he handed it over.

"I'll take my Colt if you don't mind, Bassett," grins Hashknife, and Bassett gave it up like a little man.

Then Hashknife turns to Albright.

"You and Pete Godfrey had better hustle out of this country. Just as soon as I can get hold of a U. S. marshal I'm going to cinch you two for murder. *Sabe?*"

"If you ain't got no corpse—" begins Wheeler.

"But I have," crows Hashknife. "Ask Albright if I haven't."

I had sort of eliminated Pete from the crowd, being as his right arm is in a sling, and I didn't see him pull a gun with his left hand, but anyway he was slow and awkward with it and it gives me time to shift the muzzle of my gun.

Honest to grandma, I didn't aim to make no stage-play. I sure meant to cut him plumb in two, but the bullet hit the cylinder of Pete's six-shooter, yanked it out of his hand and drove it square into Bassett's stummick. Bassett dropped flat.

Funny how a little thing like that will start things. Bassett don't no more than hit the floor when Willer Crick takes a chance. I saw a flash of Hashknife's hand, the roar of that derringer, and the oil lamp went out, and with the same flash I saw Sillman throw the door wide open.

I dropped flat and let a handful of lead pass over me, and then I hopped up and raced for the horses. Hashknife whistled to me and we untied our animals while Willer Crick shot up their furniture.

We sure rode high and handsome out of there. We went straight to the bunk-house, where we got our blankets and the singleshot rifle and then we crossed the creek to the bunch of willows. We haven't said a word yet, but when we gets our cigarets going I says:

"Have a nice visit, Hashknife?"

"Uh-huh. Nice folks, Sleepy. I reckon they hated to see me go. I had one —— of a time. I saw Sillman ride down that lane yesterday; so I figured it to be his place down there. It was kinda dark when I rode up. There's a feller in the yard, and I yells at him—

" 'Is this Sillman's place?'

"Blooey! Somebody took a shot at me. Never touched me though, but I was setting loose in the saddle, and that fool bronc threw me over the fence. I sure got the wind all knocked out of me, and when I woke up I was swamped with Willer Crickers. How did you happen to come up there?"

"Glory. She told me what was going on."

"Heavenly angels! She did? I—I'd admire to marry her."

"So would I, Hashknife, but me and you've got to forget all this love stuff."

We ain't afraid what Willer Crick will do in the night, but we ain't going to be in them buildings in the morning. We slept well. I dreams that I'm chasing that whole bunch across the hills with nothing but a handful of rocks, when all to once my blanket seems to shake out from under me, and I rolls into the brush.

Rocks and gravel seems to rain all over me. I'm still half-dreaming; so I went hunting for more rocks to throw, when I hears Hashknife chuckling like a fool.

"HASHKNIFE," says I, "did you kick me off my blanket?"

"Nope."

"Hit me with a rock?"

"No-o-o-o-o."

"Well, somebody did—dang it!"

It is just beginning to get daylight. Hashknife is setting there on his blanket, grinning like a fool.

"Ha, ha, ha!" says I. "Funny, ain't it?"

"Come on, Sleepy. I think something has happened."

We crosses the gully and climbs up to the bunk-house.

"Look at the house!" gasps Hashknife.

"Every window is busted, and she seems sort of squeegeed. The roof is about three feet out of plumb, and she has a general look of distress.

"When you gets through admirin' the arky-tecture, you might come and take a look at this, Sleepy."

Where the dynamite had been buried is a hole about ten feet deep and fifteen feet across. We looks at it and then at each other.

"My gosh!" says I. "They sure dug something up, Hashknife!"

Hashknife is peering down towards the corral, and as I turns my head he says:

"Holy horned-toads! Wouldja look at that, Sleepy!"

I took one look and then we pilgrims down to the corral. The apparition is setting on the top pole of the fence, gazing into space.

It used to be a man, but right now she don't assay a trace. It's still got on part of a pair of pants and one boot, but the rest of it is shucked clean and black as ink. It ain't got a hair left on its head, but it still moves and has its being.

"Thing," says Hashknife, "who or what did you used to be?"

"Sol Vane," it croaks. "I—does—the—lawin'—fer—Willer—Crick."

"Uh-huh," says Hashknife. "You sure look like you'd been mixed up in dirty business. Mind talking a little?"

He shakes his singed head and then nods. He's been hit so hard that he don't *sabe* things—much.

"Who done the digging, Sol?"

"Ju—Jim. Me and Pete looked on."

"You was looking for the corpse?"

"Uh-huh."

"Where's Pete and Jim?"

Sol seems to consider the question, and then looks up at the sky.

"Ain't come down yet?"

"I—never—seen—'em," he admits. "Mebby—they—ain't."

Just then Sillman rides into the place. We nods to him, but he's too busy looking at Sol Vane. Pretty soon he grins and nods to us.

"That grave had dynamite in it," explains Hashknife. "The one in the front yard. Pete and Al and the lawyer of Willer Crick came down to dig up the body."

"Oh!" croaks Sol. "Al—must—'a'—picked—into—it."

"I found Pete's hat up the road," says Sillman. "That is, I found the brim."

"He likely got blowed right up through it," says Hashknife, and then he turns to Sol. "Can you walk?"

Sol thinks it over for a while and then nods.

"Can you run?"

"Mebby."

"All right," grins Hashknife. "We'll find out, Sol. See that rise in the road up there? I'm going to make allowances for your shocking condition; so I'll count thirty. If you ain't over that hump by that time—you'll never get over. *Sabe?* One—two——"

"——!" grunts Sillman as Sol's head disappears. "You gave him too danged much!"

"Uh-huh," admits Hashknife sad-like. "I only got to twenty-seven."

"Maybe it's just as well," says Sillman. "He'll be able to tell the rest of the folks where Pete and Al went."

"If Willer Crick knowed 'em like they ought to—they don't need to be told," says I.

Sillman nods and crooks one leg around his saddle-horn.

"Willer Crick is sore this morning. They didn't all see you go out that door, and they sure mingled some lead. Some of 'em are plumb sore at me for opening the door."

"They ought to give you thanks," grins Hashknife, "'cause I'd have started a little cemetery myself if the door hadn't been open."

"Yeah, that's so, but Willer Crick only has one idea at a time. It sure put me in bad. The way she is with me is this: Everything I've got in the world is here. No outsider would give me a 'dobe dollar for what I own, and nobody on the crick would buy me out. Glory was going to marry Pete——"

"That's done busted off," says Hashknife.

"Yeah; but, figuring from the standpoint of Willer Crick, she's got to marry up here, and the rest of 'em ain't one hop better than Pete."

"We've met her," nods Hashknife. "Nice little girl."

"She guided me to your place last night," says I.

Sillman stares at me and then grins.

"Well, that makes it easier or harder. Here's the proposition: You fellers ain't the marrying kind, are you?"

"Nope," says I. "We can't afford it."

"That's good. Now I'll tell you what I want one of you to do: But first I wants to tell you something: Bassett went after the sheriff this morning to investigate the killing of the old man.

"Now, Willer Crick will sure swear you into the pen. *Sabe?* You ain't got as much chance as a celluloid dog chasing a asbestos cat through ——. I'm telling this as a friend.

"Glory is slated to marry some Willer Cricker, but if she happens to marry an outsider—well, I'll likely have to kill somebody, but we'll manage to wiggle along, I reckon.

"My brother showed up last night. He's got money and he hates Willer Crick up

one side and down the other. Him and me has a talk about Glory. I told him about you boys, and here's the proposition: He'll give one of you five hundred dollars to marry Glory if you'll agree to leave right away. *Sabe?*

"That plumb ruins the chances for anybody here to marry her, and gives her an excuse to leave here. If I let her go outside with her uncle—well, Willer Crick would make life so danged miserable for me and the rest of the family— But if she's married they can't say much. *Sabe?*"

"What does—uh—Glory think?" asks Hashknife.

"Naturally she bucks, but we've talked her into it. She don't want to marry anybody she don't love, and she says she don't love either of you fellers."

"Five hundred!" says Hashknife thoughtful-like. "Well, which one of us will be the bridegroom, old-timer?"

Sillman turns in his saddle and whistles like a steam-engine.

"You talk it over with Glory," says he. "She's waiting over there."

HE PILGRIMS up to where the excavating had been done and gets off his horse. In a minute she shows up, coming over the same rise where Sol Vane had disappeared. She rides up to us and looks back at her pa.

"Sol Vane told me about it," says she, sort of shuddering. "Nothing left?"

"Pete's hat," says Hashknife. "Your pa broke the news to us; so you might as well pick your choice."

She looks at the two of us and then busts out crying. Honest, I didn't think her kind had a bawl in their system, but I reckon most women have.

"Aw,——!" groans Hashknife. "I—I wish all of Willer Crick had owned a pick and a desire to dig up corpses."

"You—you must think I'm a fool and pa's a fool and——"

"Me and Hashknife goes fifty-fifty with you," says I. "Ain't you got no choice?"

She shakes her head and mops her eyes.

"I'm the best lookin'," says Hashknife, "but of course that don't mean nothing, as you're going to be a grass widder. I've got a lovin' disposition, too, but——shucks!"

"The Stevenses are good folks," says I. "Stevens is a good name."

"For a single-shot rifle," says Hashknife.

"We'll cut cards," says I. "Suit you, Glory?"

She nods and I gets the old deck.

"Ace high, deuce low?"

Hashknife nods and cuts the ten of spades.

"Ten-spot!" he grunts. "Dang the luck!"

I takes my card between my first two fingers and sailed it straight for the bunkhouse door, where she sticks in a crack for all to see—that pot-hooked Joner, with seven puppy-tracks!

"When does this marriage come off?" asks Hashknife when Sillman rides down to us.

"Preacher is at my house by this time, I reckon. Gives you a few hours' start of the sheriff."

"Sleepy," says Hashknife, "if you don't want to go along I'll meet you at the forks of the road."

I stands there and watches 'em move off up the road, and then I slams the hull on to Gray Wolf. I took a canteen of water and some grub. We ain't had no breakfast, but that don't matter. That hammer-headed brute bucks plumb across the gully with me, but has to quit when he hits the steep going.

I'm about half-way up that hill when I hears a yell. Two men, one on a roan and the other on a gray, are coming past the house. I recognizes Bassett, and I opines that the other is the sheriff.

I sinks the spurs into Wolf, and I just beat a bullet over the top. I sure was glad I wasn't on any ordinary bronc. That brute's middle name was Run. They hung on well, but I kept 'em going too fast to shoot straight.

I'm swinging along the side of a hill when I happens to see some riders cutting across to head me off. Appears to me that maybe some Willer Crickers were on their way to visit us. Anyway, they seemed pleased to see me.

I swings off to the right and went down a hill at a mile-a-minute clip, turns sharp at the bottom and follers an old washout for a few hundred yards. Then I swings out and rides in behind a big pinnacle of rock. I climbs on to the rocks and gets ready to make mourners in Willer Crick.

I sees Bassett and the sheriff angling down the side of the hill, going slow. Then I gets a glimpse of that other bunch. They've got around the butte and are coming up to cut in ahead of the sheriff and Bassett.

All to once it strikes me about the color of them broncs. A gray and a roan—the same color as mine and Hashknife's.

It don't no more than strike me when I hears a shot, and I sees Bassett go clawing out of his saddle. The sheriff's bronc whirled sideways and went into the washout backwards, with its rider clawing like thunder to stay on.

Things are quiet for a minute or two, and then I see two of them fellers sneak out of the mesquite and start for where the sheriff went down.

Whang! Whang! I sees one of them, I think it was Wheeler, go bow-legged all to once, and I sees the other feller's hat flip off his head. They both fell back into the brush. That sheriff wasn't hurt any to interfere with his shooting.

I rolls me a cigaret and got my bronc. It wasn't none of my business what they done to each other.

I took my time after that. I rode a long ways around, 'cause I wasn't sure where that road forked.

I didn't no more than reach that signboard when here comes Hashknife. Diablo is one mass of lather, and Hashknife is covered with dust. He stops his bronc and looks back.

"How does she seem to be a Benedict?" I asks.

Hashknife turns and looks at that sign.

THERE IS A CLICK ON WILLER CRICK
THE WORST IN ALL THIS NASHUN.
THE HITE OF THEIR AMBISHUN IS
TO BEAT THEIR OWN RELASHUN.

"Sleepy," says he, "that's the truest poetry ever written."

"Being related, you ought to know."

Hashknife grins and looks back again.

"Two cousins of Glory's was to have been at the wedding, but they was late, I reckon. Anyway they held me up for that five hundred, Sleepy. Said they heard Sillman tell about it."

"What did you do, Hashknife?"

"Nobody told 'em about that derringer, Sleepy. Handy little old weapon."

Hashknife slides off his bronc and kicks his boots against the post.

"Cold feet?" I asks.

"Cold——! I'm shaking the dust of Willer Crick off my feet."

"Uh-huh, I see. But you can't shake relationship, Hashknife."

He climbs back on his bronc, and we points up the road.

"That's true, Sleepy, but they ain't no relation to me."

"Didn't you marry her?"

"No-o-o-o."

"Didn't you get that five hundred dollars?"

"No-o-o-o."

"Well, ——!"

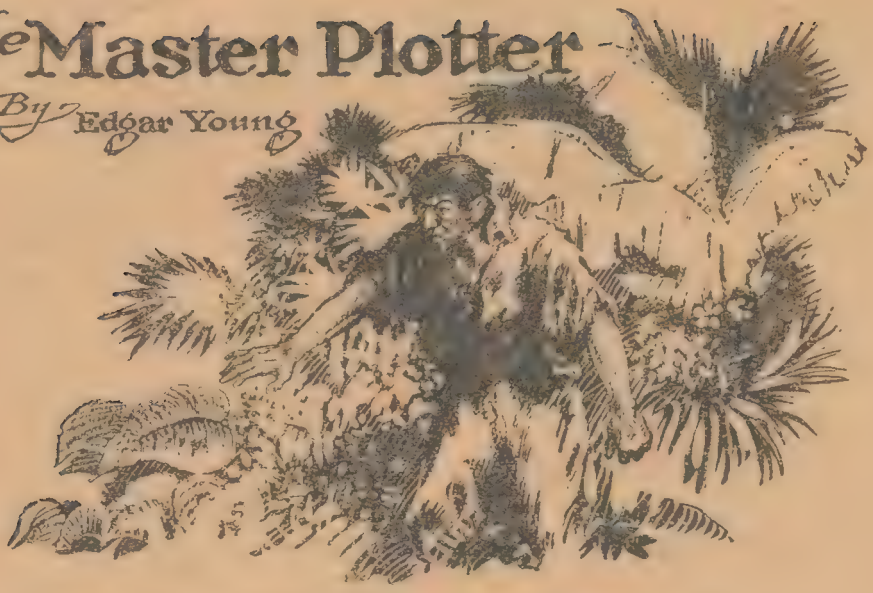
"Uncle Luke was in the yard, Sleepy," he explains.

"Oh-h-h-h-h!" says I. "I see. Well, well! Uncle Luke was in the yard, eh? That makes it seem different, Hashknife. My, my! What in —— has Uncle Luke in the yard got to do with it?"

"Uncle Luke is the sheriff of Yolo, Sleepy."

The Master Plotter

By Edgar Young



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RIDING the upbound tide of the river Guayas came the small steamer *Tiburón*, flying the Colombian flag. She was bound from Buena Ventura, Colombia, to Guayaquil, sole port of the republic of Ecuador, located forty miles up the river from its mouth, a city that has become notorious to the world as "the graveyard of South America" in former years. Rumors had come out that a revolution had been fought in its streets and that the plagues had smitten both armies and the inhabitants of the city until few survived. Huge rafts of bloated bodies had floated into the Pacific at the river's mouth. No ship had dared venture up the river for over two months.

The crew of this small steamer that ordinarily plied between the coast villages of Colombia and Ecuador, collecting and distributing cargo from such ports as Esmeraldas and Buena Ventura, consisted only of a captain, an engineer, and one fireman. On her deck were seated two passengers, both Americans, a man and a woman.

The man was big and handsome, a great broad-shouldered blond, neatly dressed in tailored white duck, Panama hat and tan shoes, with his beard trimmed to a neat Vandyke. His entire appearance was that of means and education.

The woman was small, not very strong, and her beauty was that of a rose that has just begun to fade. A tiny bit of gray tinged the hair of her temples. The man's face was coldly placid but hers was white as chalk and now and again she bit her lips nervously.

Both had noted the dead bodies they had passed floating in the river but neither had commented upon them. The captain also had seen, the engineer had come up to look, and the black-faced fireman had crawled up from the boiler-room to peer at them.

Below the *matadero*, or slaughter house, just below the outskirts of the city, without having received a signal to do so, the engineer stopped his engines and the boat drifted with the upgoing current.

The American stood up when the engines ceased to throb and walked to the wheel house. He spoke a few words to the captain, who shrugged his shoulders and spread his hands fanlike in reply.

The engineer again thrust his head up just in time to receive a fetid breath of air that swept down the river. The slaughter house smell at this point was usually sickening, but this was no slaughter house smell. It was worse than that. It was the putrid odor of thousands of dead bodies, lying in the humid dampness of the surrounding swamps. It was a stench so rank that it seemed liquid, solid, the tiniest bit of which

penetrated to the farthest recesses of the lungs and caused the stomach to writhe in nausea.

No one who breathed that odor would ever forget it as long as he existed on the earth. Its rottenness beggars any description. From the first tiny breath it grew more strong, more dense, more foul. The lungs seemed to close against it as if an iron hand clutched the throat.

The engineer went below and started his engines in reverse motion, again without having received any instructions. The boat, backing water against the current, stood still. He and his fireman now came on deck. They walked rapidly to the wheel-house. The captain released the wheel and came out to meet them. The three spoke rapidly together in guttural Spanish, now and then looking over at the two American passengers.

The American man heard and understood. He got up and walked over to them. He began to argue with them. His voice was calm and cold but theirs raised in snarls of excitement.

He recalled that he had paid them five hundred dollars gold for the trip, five thousand Colombian paper pesos, enough to make them rich in their own country when it was shared between them. They claimed they had not known how bad it was there in Guayaquil, thinking it a customary pestilence, or they would not have ventured for many times the amount.

The American man glanced over his shoulder at the woman. Her head was turned and she was watching but he knew she did not understand a word of the conversation because she spoke no Spanish. He drew a roll of bills from his pocket, an immense roll three inches through, with a rubber band around it. He snapped the rubber off and began to count off bills slowly. Very slowly he did this, pressing and pulling the money, and allowing each bill to remain before their eyes as long as was possible. He had bribed men before, and he had traded with cunning Jews, and he knew the psychology of handling money thus in trading.

He kept counting until he had peeled off fifty ten-dollar notes, yellow notes with an American eagle spread across them, money that is known and sought for in all parts of the world by civilized and savage alike. The men's eyes glowed as they watched him count and saw the wad he crumpled into one hand. It was a lot of money, the equal of another five thousand paper pesos back in Colombia. He extended it toward the captain.

"This other five hundred, *oro*, to land us on the wharf," he stated.

The men spoke together eagerly in short phrases. It would only take them a matter of ten minutes to run to the wharf and unload the passengers. It was a lot of money. They would be doubly rich for they knew a changer who paid bonus for American bills. The captain and the fireman started to nod their assent. As the engineer squinted his eyes and peered up the river a breeze came down that smote them with an odor that seemed to shrivel them in their tracks.

All four of the men gasped. The woman coughed hollowly into her handkerchief.

"We go no farther," said the engineer, speaking for them all.

The American called to the woman.

"They are trying to hold me up for more cash. It's just like these greasers not to carry out their contract. I'm going to make them do it. Don't be frightened for I am going to use force with them."

She nodded mutely.

WITH a quick spring the American seized the engineer around the waist and in three long strides he came to the top of the ladder. The engine-room was a good seven feet below. With a swift kick and a downward wrench of the arm he hurled the engineer bodily to the foot of the ladder. As he scrambled up the American snatched a revolver from under his coat and fired under his bare feet. As the engineer sprang to his levers the American shouted to him to put his machinery in forward motion.

A cry from the woman warned the man as he crouched, looking down into the engine-room. He sprang to one side as the captain and fireman bore down upon him with upraised knives. He caught the wrist of the fireman who was ahead and using the momentum of his rush flung him down after the engineer as if he had been a small boy. With a backhanded stroke of the revolver he knocked the captain to his knees. The captain crawled to his feet, gaping. The American pointed to the wheel-house with the revolver and motioned up the river.

As the captain moved to take the wheel again the American shouted down into the engine-room. His words were a volume of Spanish oaths bidding the two men remain at their posts and a caution, in no uncertain terms, as to what would happen if they poked a head above the deck. He then came to the wheel-house and stood with his revolver resting on the window-sill, muzzle trained on the pit of the captain's stomach.

The boat moved swiftly up the river, passed the *matadero* and came below the market. The woman noted that the banks were literally lined with bodies and that drifts of them had caught in the eddies near the shore. Her face grew more ghastly and she bit her lips until the blood oozed from them.

The captain yanked on a rope and a gong rang below. The boat drifted for a few feet and the gong clanged again to reverse. The captain put his wheel over hard and the boat warped itself in to the wharf.

The American ran to the baggage that was piled forward on the deck. He hurled the two steamer trunks and the suitcases and grips out upon the wharf and, with a spring, he seized the woman in his arms and jumped after them. His feet had hardly struck the rough board planking when the boat turned and headed out into the stream. Smoke began to belch from her stack as she turned down toward the coast. She was going to Colombia and life.

The woman reeled as the man released her from his arms. She choked and gasped and gagged with nausea from the reeking odors that enveloped them. Her cough now came hard and racking. She seated herself on one of the trunks and coughed until she was shaking as if with a chill. The man was staring around him curiously with little attention to her. Her cough ceased and she regarded him critically. Her cheeks were hectic and her hands and lips trembling, but her eyes were sharp as needle points.

The man noted that she studied him and he looked back into her face without a trace of emotion showing in his own. A keen phrenologist would have said that his large eyes were too wide apart, a sign of misdirected genius and cruelty, and that his head was too broad for its length, a gigantic squirrel-head, a head of cupidity and greed. Handsome of face and body he was by any standards.

"Well?" he asked, coldly smiling.

The woman's fear and anger congealed within her. She had passed the climax of fear and now had struck that streak of lean that exists in the frailest women, that streak that makes them undergo the torturing pangs of childbirth, with pain that would kill many a man, that subconscious bravery that is in all women and is only discovered under extreme hardship.

She stood up and faced him and began to speak, very slowly, chosing her words. Her voice was as a diamond point scraping on steel, sharp, cold, cutting.

"Bruce Morgan, you are an inhuman wretch."

He smiled sneeringly.

"Rave on, little one; get it out of your system."

The woman continued as if she had not heard.

"You are utterly depraved. There is not a spark of good in you. I now know. I have come all the way to find out. You have seen that I have made no comment. People told me behind your back that I should not come to this place. I believed what you said. I came. I have found out."

Morgan started to speak but she motioned for him to be silent.

"I see it all now. I could have seen it all before but I did not want to see. I did not want to doubt. I wanted to believe. I see things as plain as if I had watched apart as a third person."

She looked away and spoke slowly as if half to herself.

"I can see you beginning to be interested. The first time was there on the porch when I happened to mention how much my little place was worth. I can see it now, but I couldn't see it then. I was already much interested in you. Love had blinded me. And then you began to woo me—me, the little old maid who had been left some property by her father. Ah! I thought you were grand, a fine looking, intelligent man. You had traveled and you could speak interestingly of those travels. Women envied me, girls raved about you to me, mothers looked upon you with calculating eye. It was my lot to have you, I, the little old maid.

"Maybe you didn't know that I was a spinster from choice. I could have married a half-dozen of the home fellows at one

time and another. None of them interested me. They didn't know anything. They hadn't seen anything. There was nothing romantic about them. They were just pluggers and plodders. I knew more of the world than most of them, for I had traveled to a few of the neighboring cities and I had read much. I wanted a strong-chested man with a deep voice, one who had been out in rough places with rough men and had seen strange things to tell me about.

"Those boys there at home were good boys but, by the perversity of my heart, I could not bring myself to love them when they looked upon me with melting eyes. I wanted to be swept away. I wanted some one to hang my illusions upon. You came along. I hung them all upon you. It was a mantle of Queen Mab I placed around you. No prince of fairyland could have been more wonderful than you appeared to me."

Her cheeks burned an unhealthy red as she gasped. She began to cough hollowly, deep racking coughs that shook her frame. Bruce Morgan made a wry face as she ceased. She laughed coldly.

"You were very solicitous about my cough. You asked many questions at one time or another. You learned that both my parents had died with T. B. and that my only brother had died with it a few years before. You got those details all right. I now know why. You wondered how long I would last if I married you, which you knew I would if you asked me. That was your first plan. You intended to play a waiting game. And then? After we were married and you began to grow tired of the little Arkansas town, you did not know just how long it would be. Consumptives sometimes lasted a long time.

"It wasn't two months before you hit on the idea of Guayaquil. You longed to be back here, you said. You spoke of what a healthy place it was and how much good it would do me to live here. It would cure my cough! It would build me up! You knew when you spoke that it was considered the unhealthiest place on the face of the globe, and that it was shunned by all men who did not have to come here for some reason or other. You knew that it was called the graveyard of South America.

"Those stories you told me of the moonlight and the waving palms, the luscious fruit, the canoes lazily plying the lagoons and rivers, the tinkling of guitars from the shaded gardens, were masterpieces of fiction. The girl who made the beds in Panama threw up her hands in horror when I told her my destination.

"We were the only passengers on the mail steamer when she sailed from Balboa. She was a coast boat and this was to be her destination. I knew why she turned back from Buena Ventura. I knew, but I would not allow myself to believe that you were tricking me. The purser told me you were insane to come here. He watched when you went for a cigar and came and told me. As close as you guarded me, without my appearing to notice that you did guard me, he got the news to me. Do you know what I told him? I told him that he lied, that there was some other reason for the boat turning back. When you searched around for a small steamer to charter, a Colombian native who spoke English told me that even Colombia was quarantined against Guayaquil this time. I would not believe. I did not want to believe. I wanted to see with my own eyes before I doubted you. I have seen. Now I know. The veil that I have placed around you is thrown back. I see what is and has been beneath all the time."

Morgan chuckled mirthlessly.

His wife's face drew into a white knot of rage.

"You have the money. The house, the little farm, the store I let for a few dollars a month, was converted into cash and express checks. What was the full amount? Forty-two thousand, four hundred and thirty dollars. By taking a few more weeks we could have got fifty thousand. You were in haste."

She pointed her finger straight into his eyes and her voice rose to a high-pitched treble as she shouted.

"What there is left you have there in your pockets. You figured for it. You made love for it. You acted a part for it. You married me for it. You brought me here to die so it could be yours. You sold your soul for it, a few paltry thousand. You earned it. It is yours."

She drew back her hand and struck him a sharp blow in the mouth with her clenched fist. He put up his hand to ward off other blows but did not offer to retaliate.

"You earned it, you scoundrel! Take it and begone! You brought me here to die. I can do that—*like a woman*. If you ever

meet up with any of them from Malvern just say that I died game."

Morgan stroked the bruises on his lips gingerly. He appeared unaffected by the words. From his pocket he drew the roll of bills and peeled off five ten-dollar notes.

"You will need this to rent a room."

She glared into his face with blazing eyes.

"People who die do not need a room."

Then, without taking even her hand-bag, or anything except the clothes she wore upon her back, she walked along the wharf and turned into the stricken city. Morgan, looking after her, noted that she stopped to cough and then groped her way along with her handkerchief to her eyes, crying and gamely hiding her tears from him until she passed around the corner of a bamboo building beyond his gaze.

II

BRUCE MORGAN walked out on the edge of the wharf and looked up and down the river. There was not a river steamer, boat or bamboo raft to be seen. The other bank was lined with overhanging trees, mangroves and palms, and huge lily-shaped wild banana bushes, all trailing with vines and lianas, the whole jungle like a mat of deep, poisonous, green—a green that frightens with its intensity.

The river was about a half-mile across at this place. Just a little above, horizontally across, was a slight gap in the jungle where a rickety wooden wharf extended, and behind which the tile tops of the railroad buildings and the grass tops of native huts showed through gaps in the jungle. This was Duran, the terminus of the G. & Q. Railroad, occupied by the American and native employes of the road in normal times. Studying it closely, he noted that the company tug was tied up to the wharf and that no smoke came from its stack. He watched and listened and saw no switch-engines in the yard. Neither did smoke come from the smoke-stack of the shops. He knew these for signs that the road was shut down, as it had been many times before.

Had the road been running he would have tried to make his way across the river and get a train for the high country. Now he knew that the chances were that the track through Black Swamp for the thirty miles to the foot of the Andes was lined with soldiers and snipers firing on whoever came along. That things were much worse than before in both cities he could easily see.

Ordinarily there were some few cases of fever and plague in both places, and just a few, for the natives were mostly immunes. Strangers coming in did not find out that both cities were pest holes on account of this fact.

A non-immune usually lasted a week before he fell a victim to disease, with one chance in a thousand of recovering. He had thought to disguise the fact that Guayaquil was an unhealthy place from his wife. He had calculated on renting a small bamboo cottage near the very part Colonel Gorgas mentioned as the hatching-ground of the *Aëdus calopus*, the mosquito which carries yellow-fever, when he made a survey of things a couple of years before. He prided himself that he was a natural immune from the fevers and plagues, for he had been through several epidemics and by chance had not fallen a victim. Duran was just as bad but he had figured on keeping shy of there for fear some one would warn his wife or tell her some story to his discredit; for there were men who knew quite a bit about him and who now and then came to Duran to work a month or so.

Also, he had seen many Americans die when he had worked there. The train-master died. The chief clerk came down from Huigra, took refuge on the U. S. S. *Yorktown* lying in the river, and died. The captain of the *Yorktown* went ashore and came back in a box.

The little American cemetery at Duran grew apace. The entire lot was filled as close as they could dig graves. They even dug them just at the ends of the ties on the right-of-way opposite the cemetery.

Bruce Morgan had gone about Duran and had ventured across the river into Guayaquil dozens of times without even feeling faint. He was a strong man and he had survived. There is such a thing as being a natural immune from the plagues and he decided he was one. His face beamed as he thought of it.

He turned from studying the river and the town across and looked in the direction taken by his wife by legal marriage and church ceremony. He frowned and chewed at his mustaches with his thick white teeth. He took a few strides along the

wharf, as if to follow, but came back and stood where he had been before. He had thought to bring her there to die quickly without her knowing why he had brought her. To give him his dues, he could have run away and left her in Malvern. He could have killed her out of hand with some quick poison and no one would have been the wiser, for they had appeared very devoted—he had seen to his part of that.

Brute he undoubtedly was and it is necessary to bring forward brute psychology in dealing with the inner workings of his mind. The daily papers are not free from accounts of similar men—on the contrary, they frequently contain mention of such. Quite recently the editor of a great metropolitan daily murdered his wife rather than see her grow old and ugly, and the alleged son of a senator killed his sweetheart on the other side of the continent and smilingly confessed that it was because of his love for her. Dr. Havelock Ellis has devoted chapters to similar cases. To those who think such things can not be, the answer is: such things are. Thus it is a peculiar bit of brute psychology that would rather see a loved one die than suffer mental anguish.

The truth is that he loved her. Yet this love was not supreme. He considered his freedom more dear to him than his love. Love had begun binding him to his wife's apron strings and he had chafed under the yoke of domestic servitude. And he had not wished her to suffer anguish of the heart and soul by deserting her. In order to spare her such pain and torture he had decided she must die—happy to the last—in a manner that would worry him least. According to his brute code he felt partly justified.

What she had said really cut him to the quick but he was a man with a gambler's trick of hiding what was in his mind. She had only mentioned the money. She really made him worse than he was. The worst criminal can condone his own crimes while his blood rages hot over crimes of others. Had she only said that he had done it to spare her the pain it would not have cut so badly. Her words rang in his ears:

"You earned it, you scoundrel. Take it and begone!"

He sneered and laughed harshly to convince himself that he was his old brutal self. He prided himself on his brutality. Brutality seemed to betoken extreme strength to him. Half-dead men and women had begun to crawl around his feet. They babbled and moaned for pity. He laughed and cursed them. He kicked away a hand that clung to his leg. Others tore at the fastenings of the trunks and bags, looking for medicines and food. He snarled at them like a beast. Yes, he was his old self. He was not weak, he kept telling himself. Shaking his clenched fist in the direction taken by his wife, he shouted.

"Yes, I've earned it. That's the reason I did it all. I schemed for it—I loved for it. Now it's mine. It's mine! And I'm going to get out to life with it."

Yet in his heart he was a liar to himself. A man can not fool himself. It is impossible. It can't be done. He had loved her so much that he had come to all this trouble so that she might die happy. Love now tugged at him. He felt weak and giddy. Never before had he felt thus. He was a bad man, a real bad man, not some drunken miner or farm laborer who commits crimes half from ignorance. He was an intelligent man, a sort of philosopher who premeditated crime of the worst sort without a shudder.

In his youth the world had treated him rough and he had turned, snarling, upon it. His hand was against every man and woman. He was accustomed to taking what he wanted, thinking only for himself and not considering the desires and liberties and feelings of others one iota in his calculations.

Many crimes were behind him. He had robbed. He had killed. He had cheated. A foul thing was the soul hidden within his handsome body. This bringing her here had been a weakness of his. When he had first seen her he had figured on marrying her as soon as he could and leaving when he got his hands on the money. Her love, her confidence, her adulation, her devotion, her very innocence of the vast amount of crime that existed in the world, had weakened him. He had decided he would be kind. She must die rather than suffer pain. Then he would be free, a roaring blond taking what he wished in all parts of the world.

The very thing he had wished to avoid happened. She had found out and he knew how she would suffer. One thing had been lacking in his calculations—God. He shook his fist up at God and cursed him. God did not reply. He never does, verbally.

Morgan kicked away the natives that

clung to his legs and moaned their misery. He peered along under the edge of the wharf to see if any canoes were tied there. He found one a short distance above just underneath the edge. He knelt and reached underneath and untied the rope. He dragged it down to where the baggage lay and tied it to a ring in the floor of the wharf until he loaded in his part of the baggage.

It is the custom for the natives to carry their paddles home with them for they spend much time working them into shape from hard pieces of wood. Finding no paddle around, he picked up a piece of box-lid he thought would serve.

DESCENDING into the canoe he untied the rope and shoved off down-stream. He paddled steadily with long sweeping strokes. The eddies were quiet until down below the slaughter-house and he made good time this far. But here the current swept around the end of a slight fill where cattle were driven up from the river. This current whirled the head of his canoe up-stream. He fought against it and headed it down-stream again. But still the canoe went up-stream stern first. Fighting thus with the canoe headed toward the sea, he was carried from the sea and up-stream.

He tried to paddle back to the eddies where he had started but the current gripped the canoe and swept it out in the middle of the river. Many floating islands cluttered around him, great pieces of rotted vegetation and decayed logs that came down from the swamps when the little streams raised with a freshet.

Some of these islands were a hundred feet across and some were no larger than a barrel. All were covered with giant lilies and huge, glassy leaves. Among these floated corpses of all ages, bloated to horrible size and with the flesh like black jelly, a sort of bluish black, and falling from the bones with the least little jar or movement of the water. Bodies of horses, cows, and pigs also floated with them. It was disgusting.

Morgan noted he was being swept past Duran, just above and across from Guayaquil. He fought viciously to make a landing there. He paddled until the sweat poured down his face and oozed through his white coat.

He had begun to gain headway toward the Duran wharf and would have made it had not the paddle split in two. The piece that remained in his hand caught in the weeds of a floating island and snapped off until he had only a stick a few inches long in his hand.

He tossed the small piece into the water and began to swear. He cursed the tropics, South America, Ecuador, the river, the boat and himself. He thought of God again. He never had thought much of God all his life until over there in Guayaquil when he had accused God of tricking him. Strong man that he was, he had cursed God and still lived.

He raised his face toward the clouds and told God what he thought of such trickery in one vile oath after the other. And for all the reply he received he might have been speaking to the river or the banks on either side.

He folded his arms across his breast and sat calmly on the steamer-trunk, staring around. He was the only living soul in sight on the river. He fell to muttering against the putrid foulness of the water and the poisonous green of the jungle.

The river narrowed down until it was only a quarter of a mile across. He drifted along, cursing the current which ran up-stream and carried him away from where he wished to go. He calculated that it would soon turn and he would get a piece of drift-wood to propel the canoe along when it finally came back down-stream and he would make it out over the bar during the night.

His attention was called to the fact that the canoe was leaking by the water sloshing about his feet. He was surprized when he looked and saw a couple of inches of water in the bottom of the canoe.

He crawled along, looking for the leak. He found a crack in the bow end through which the water gushed. Perhaps the natives had used the good canoes in getting away and had left this behind because it was old and worthless.

His collar was a rag around his neck. He pulled it off and, laying it along the leak, pounded it in with his fist and the blade of his knife. The wood was rotten and the crack opened more. He followed the collar with his necktie, which he pounded in after the same fashion.

The water ceased to flow in through the

leak. The water had followed him to the bow and stood over the tops of his shoes. When he crept to the stern the water followed him there and lifted the trunk and bags and floated them around. He picked up the trunk and dropped it over the side into the river, tossing the bags out after it. All three pieces of baggage gurgled as they filled with water and then sank out of sight.

He took off his Panama hat and began to bail out the water. The hat was fine-woven and had cost over a hundred dollars on Front Street in Colon. He did not consider the cost; he was only glad it held water.

He worked steadily until he had all out but a little on the bottom, and he was scooping this up with his hand when the dugout struck a submerged snag. It did not split suddenly from the impact. It slowly opened, for the wood was very rotten and gradually fell into two parts as the water gushed in. Morgan sprawled full length on one of the halves, thinking to support himself in this manner, but it sank clear to the bottom as if it were a piece of lead.

Coming to the surface, he started swimming strongly to the nearest shore. The current was less rapid than it had been and he was an expert swimmer. He made good headway even with his shoes and clothes on and in a few minutes he had landed on the Guayaquil side. The place where he landed was about five miles above the city. In ordinary times he would have been in danger of a shark at this point but now the sharks were too lazy to attack a live man; also they were scavengers that preferred carrion to live meat.

Morgan waded through the mud of the shore and into the edge of the jungle where the ground was boggy but more firm. The trees were very close together, and the down-growing limbs had taken root where they reached the ground. Some trees had as many as a hundred trunks thus growing, forming a solid roof overhead. The intervening spaces were covered with trailing lianas, like huge clusters of whitish ropes covered with moss, vines and parasites.

Underfoot in the muck grew grass with leaves like hack-saw edges, glassy-leaved lilies, and toadstools as large as footballs. The entire jungle was a veritable anarchy of nature, each growth trying to thrust the other from the light and from the soil.

It was almost impossible to move about. He took off his coat, which was wet and clammy, and flung it down. It was not so very hot in the jungle, not over ninety-four degrees, but it was very humid. It seemed that no current of air was able to move, and a thin fog rose from the ground to a distance of about a yard—the jungle miasma.

Morgan stood thinking for several minutes.

He forced his way a few more paces into the jungle. It was midafternoon but the sun did not penetrate through the mat of roof overhead. Within the jungle it appeared like twilight.

By following along the river he knew he could make it back to Guayaquil, but he did not wish to return to Guayaquil. The reason for his coming there had miscarried, and he wanted to get away to some other place. He now knew he would not be able to make it down the river to the coast because he had no boat and no means of making a raft.

Only one thing remained for him to do; that was to get to the Andes and up out of the jungle where he could travel. Perhaps then he would be able to cross the river higher up and head south to the G. & Q., striking it about Huigra and following it into the high plateau where he could strike a tributary of the Amazon, down which he could float to Iquitos. There a ship could be had for Europe or the United States.

Having decided thus, he began floundering farther into the jungle. He turned parallel to the river. But he had to make hundreds of short detours around patches of jungle through which he was unable to force his body on account of the tree-trunks and the walls of vines. He finally lost sense of direction and did not know which way he wanted to go.

He knew this would not do. When men get lost they must be careful. A sudden frenzy comes to men who know they are lost. Some weaker natures go insane the moment they are lost.

Morgan knew he must avoid acting hastily. He stopped and stood still and tried to fix the direction in his mind. It was no use. He did not know east from west or north from south. He worked his way to a huge mangrove which had one great trunk surrounded by hundreds of others smaller trunks where the limbs had

grown down and taken root in the earth. The vines clung to him like hands trying to hold him back as he forced his way to the main trunk of the tree. At last he came to it. It was wrapped with huge vines as large as his body. He pushed and surged his way upward.

Climbing far into the top, he broke away the branches and the sunlight poured upon him. He noted that the sun was about to set, a great red ball poised in the sky. That was west where it was setting. He must fix that in his brain, west in *that* direction, so it would not be forgotten. It seemed as if it should be north over there where the sun set, but he knew it was west for the sun always sets in the west. It was setting in the Pacific beyond his gaze. He could only catch a glimpse of the river off to the left. He had been traveling directly away from it instead of parallel to it. His course lay just opposite to where the sun was setting—due east.

He would have liked to go west to the coast but that was impossible. He must go east. He knew that the Andes must lie in that direction.

He turned from blinking at the sun and pulled the branches farther apart on that side, swaying giddily on the large limb to which he clung. Yes, there were the mountains. They only seemed a few miles away. Their snow-clad peaks seemed to tower just a short distance from him over there to the east, but this did not fool him. He knew that they were not very near for they were thirty miles away at Duran, where the railroad ran across the swamp to their base. He did not know how far they were on this side, possibly the same distance.

He came down from the tree. It was now almost pitch dark in the jungle as the angle of the sun grew lower. His hands were stinging where he had scratched them on the thorns of the vines as he climbed. He felt of his shirt and trousers and found they had been torn in many places. He regretted having thrown away his coat and would have returned for it, but he remembered that he had stood upon it and tramped it into the mud.

He knew he should have a machete to cut his way along. But he did not have one. Things were not going the way he had planned. He was no trail-hitter, no typical tropical tramp, no jungle explorer. His life had been spent as a gentleman, living off of the hardships of others and working only when compelled to. Well, he could stand hardships, too, he decided. Afterward he would take it easy when he got out where luxury was to be had.

West was back there. East was over there. He must remember that. He must travel also. By morning he would be out of this vile jungle.

Darkness fell more dense. It grew so dark he could not see his hand when he held it before his face. He groped his way along. And yet, now and then, he heard the *papagallos* chattering above him and he knew the sun had not yet ceased to shine.

All night long he traveled thus. Now and again he heard some beast crashing along ahead of, behind, or off to one side of him. Snakes and clammy things squirmed from under his feet. One large snake that had felt like a fire-hose under his foot, that he had taken for a fallen limb or vine, had suddenly squirmed and almost dislocated his leg with the quick wrench. But nothing attacked him.

His revolver had fallen from the holster when he swam the river. But he had a short sheath-knife that had remained in his belt. Many times he paused and listened, with the knife in his tense right hand, ready to fight for his life with any beast or forest denizen. Perhaps they sensed that he was more brute than they and would fight dearly for his life. At any rate they did not spring upon him. Thus he plunged along all night.

A SORT of gray twilight came and he knew the sun was up. He thought of climbing a tree again but he was sure that west was back there and east over there. All night long he had kept bringing this fact into his mind as he stumbled and fell and made detours by groping his way around places that blocked his advance.

His clothing was mere rags now that clung to him in shreds. His shoes were hunks of wet leather without shape that sucked in and blew out water with each step. What use were they? His feet were as wet as they could possibly be and the shoes impeded his progress, he thought.

He bent for a moment and cut the strings and left the shoes buried where he had stood knee-deep in slime. He pulled off his clammy socks and rolled his trousers to his knees.

All day long he traveled thus. When a man walks barefooted through mud all day it blisters the feet from sucking back and forth in the mud. The skin becomes soft. These blisters break and the place where they raised gets raw from the friction of walking.

The best walking for a barefooted man is along a beach just above the waterline where the sand is smooth and hard, but this also blisters the feet. Blood blisters as large as marbles form on each toe, and as large as dollars on the heels and balls of feet. These break and the flesh wears away to the white cords underneath. But walking through mud is worse than this. There is some sand in the mud and this wears upon the skin of the entire foot and lower leg until they become as raw as a piece of beefsteak. Also there are sharp sticks and stones just beneath the surface which cut jagged wounds in the soles of the feet when a man steps down without being able to see what is beneath.

Morgan had made a mistake. Any kind of shoes were better than none. Had he been a tropical tramp he would have kept the shoes until they were worn entirely out, and then he would have made the socks last for many more miles. He remembered having heard some one speak of such things but had paid no attention. Now he was learning at first hand to his sorrow.

Darkness again settled upon the jungle and he knew it was late afternoon without. He had walked an afternoon, a night, and a day. He wondered that he had been able to do this. He had struck unknowingly the great reserve force that exists in all men.

What a man will endure without dying in the jungle is unbelievable. The records of such things have never been printed and would not be believed if they were. A man will stand more than any other animal that walks, creeps, crawls, swims, or flies. A man can walk a mule or a dog to death on good roads, he can out-starve any other animal. This is because a man has will-power to force himself to live.

Another thing that happens to a man who is undergoing hardship and starvation. His mind grows keener each moment. All the fat is burned off the cells. Every tiny speck of brain becomes alive and active. This began to happen to Bruce Morgan. He never knew that he was capable of such deep thinking. No, he was not insane. His mind was super-alert. His thoughts came rapidly, so rapidly that his mouth would have been incapable of putting them into words. His brain was racing, and any attempt to put his thoughts into words would have resulted in halting and stammering of speech from failure of coordination.

He occupied himself with philosophy and evolution. Thoughts sprang to his brain and he knew many things he had never dreamed of before. And he knew that they were true. Self-evident facts that proved themselves to him. No one on earth would have been able to convince him that they were not true, for they were. What he learned thus he would never forget—if he lived through the ordeal.

He saw himself as he was, a product of evolution. He saw life, all life, as having sprung from the same source. He knew that all animals were descended from the same identical beginning and that trees and vegetation had descended from this same source. It was as if something had melted and run down different channels, forming into shapes from contact with each other and from striking against the bottom and edges of the channel. Some things had walked, others crawled, other swum, others stood still as plants and vegetables, and some were so nearly both animal and plant that it was impossible to classify them into one or the other.

It was as plain as the nose on his face. By one swoop he had jumped far back of Darwin's theory, that traced man and ape to a common ancestry. All life had a common ancestry. And from this common ancestry had sprung plant life also. He had jumped back beyond pantheism and one short pace beyond Herbert Spencer's theory of heterogeneity of life from the homogeneous. He had never heard of Spencer, and if he had heard of him would have decided that he had suffered hardship of some kind much more severe than the fatheaded people who misunderstood him and slandered his good name with foul lips that were not worthy to lick the dust from his boots.

He walked all day and all night, pondering such things. His concentration was like a needle-point that pricked into the whys and wherefores of things. Had he been able to get his ideas into the snobbish print of scientific journals he would have astounded the world, because he finally saw the system of life on the planet. He saw the

earth with all its life as if it were a tiny ball he examined in his hand. It was most interesting and he could not leave off thinking about it and examining it. And having satisfied himself to his utter satisfaction he began to think of things away from the earth.

He wondered what could have caused it all. This subject absorbed him. He scarcely noted when it grew twilight again and it was day outside the jungle. A small thing was day and night, just a turning of the tiny speck in the light of the sun, millions of miles away. There were millions of such specks in the universe, millions of systems of such specks, revolving around some greater speck that still held heat and magnetism. He knew enough astronomy to know that the earth was one of the least important of those that could be viewed through telescopes.

What was going on on the others? What kind of product of evolution was the head of animal life on these millions of other specks of dust so much larger than the earth? Had the same homogeneous seed been sown? Had different? Had any been sown? Was it a creature like man that controlled or was it some huge intellectual fish, or bird, or some highly developed vegetable or plant that controlled animals? Or had inorganic matter evolved to a high state of development from environment that was different? Was there life in the center of the earth and was it a live thing like himself—a living ball that supported life as parasites live on the thick skin of a rhinoceros?

He had seen spider- and fly-catching plants in the botanical gardens at Rio de Janeiro once. He had seen sensitive trees, the giant species from which those tiny pot-plants came that were kept for a curiosity back in the United States, fold up their limbs and branches and leaves when struck with a stick or when approached by danger. What about all these things?

HE LOST track of time and wandered along. His trousers became as mere strings that clung to him. His flesh had swelled from yaws and insect bites until he was puffed from head to foot.

He noticed, on looking down at his feet when he stood on a hummock in the swamp, that his legs were swollen out even with the ends of his toes, forming a straight line from knee to toe-ends. The toe-nails were setting back into the flesh, making the leg appear like that of an elephant. He knew he had elefantiasis which is as common as malaria in the tropics among those who go barefoot.

He wondered why he did not come to the mountains. He had undoubtedly walked for more than a week, day and night. He had eaten no food. He had drunk no water.

Men who write of the horrible pangs of starvation have never missed more than three meals. After thirty-six hours without food hunger departs and does not return again. Men who have fasted long periods must force food into their mouths and gag as they swallow it. After a little food has opened the withered stomach then hunger comes, an intense, ravenous hunger that could tear and rend any live and disgusting thing were it not satisfied.

Neither do men remain thirsty after thirty-six hours, when they are in humid air. Being denied water through the stomach, the body absorbs it from the air through the lungs and through the skin. It is only in desert places where men suffer from thirst. Also it is only in very humid places that they can absord enough for their needs, in a swamp or standing in a river. A man standing waist-deep in water could live eternally without a drink if he conquered the craving at the beginning.

Morgan had known better than to drink the inky black water underfoot. This would have poisoned him instantaneously and would not have quenched his thirst.

Yet he was in great misery. His entire flesh was burning with fever and his insides felt dead and aching. Delirium tried to sweep over him but he fought it back and kept his mind clear.

Men have had concentration enough to remain sober after consuming vast quantities of alcohol by fighting against the effects. Large bets had been won by men who drank as much as a quart of high-proof whisky and remained sober. It was the same with him as he fought delirium. Men with a fever of 105 have kept their heads clear and talked rationally with their attendants. Others have raved with a fever of 103. It depends upon the concentration that is brought to bear.

Morgan did not know how long he would be able to hold out against the delirium that tried to sweep over him. He began to think that he should take another observation

from a tree so that he might get out of the jungle before he began raving and death claimed him. He did not want to die.

He came upon a large tree and was amazed to see footprints at its base. He feebly shouted his exultation. Some one with shoes on had stood there, he noted by the tracks. Looking upward, he saw mud where the person had climbed into the tree and a piece of cloth where a torn bit clung to a thorn. He looked and noted that the tracks had struck off in a different direction from which he came.

He followed, half running, stepping his bare feet in the tracks. Everything looked familiar to him, some way or other. The light was very poor but, as he peered ahead to try and see if he could penetrate far enough to see the person who had gone in that direction, it seemed as if he had seen this path before. It came to him suddenly like a snap in his head.

He began to laugh. He laughed hysterically. The tears flowed from his eyes in hysterical mirth. They ran down his cheeks as he cried and laughed at the same time without being able to stop. He fell to his knees and chuckled, beating his fists down in to the mud and splashing it upon himself. It was a huge joke. He had traveled in a circle. It was his own tracks he had started to follow. He ceased laughing and crawled weakly back to the tree where he had taken the first observation.

He grasped the vines and pulled himself to his feet. He was reeling with weakness. That involuntary laughing fit had weakened him.

The light was a little better than it had been back in the extreme depths of the jungle. He looked down at his swollen arms and held out first one arm and then the other in the grayish light.

He punched at his belly, which was bloated to enormous size. He could scarcely bend his hand to his face. He had to bow his head far over so that he could reach his face with it. The back of his hand was encrusted with dried mud but the palm was more clean. He wondered what he had done with the knife. If he had had it he would have tried to cut his throat.

He bent his head farther over and his tongue lolled out as he brought his hand into contact with his face.

The face had little feeling and with his fingers he traced its shape. It was swollen to the size of a water-pail, he found out. The beard was matted and twisted like bristles upon a hog's back after it has run wild in the thickets. Huge warts covered his entire face.

He bowed yet farther and found that his hair was a wild, snarled mane that appeared dry as straw. He panted from the exertion of bending and feeling himself. His face was swollen until he had no nose; his mouth was a gaping slit through which the tongue lolled like a dry ball of flesh; his eyes protruded like those of an alligator or a Gila lizard, with the lids overhanging from top and bottom.

He knew he had yellow fever and bubonic, as well as wart fever. Mosquitos had annoyed him much and they swarmed upon him now but he could not feel them when they stung. He had elephantiasis. Smiting his thigh with his hand he noted that it was solid like a chunk of wood, with no rebound to the flesh. Yes, he had beriberi. It was considered fatal when it attacked above the knees. He also had a half-dozen other diseases at one and the same time and his blood was rotten with germs of sickness. Yet he was sane.

He wondered why he was alive. Maybe God had something to do with it. He peered upward and tried to catch a glimpse of sky through the tree-tops. He did not curse God nor did he pray to him. He now knew why God did not reply. He had already replied to all arguments for and against him millions of years before Morgan had been born. He was so great that Morgan's keen, searching mind was unable to comprehend one tiny jot of his greatness. He was so great that the entire universe, with its floating specks of dust and its man-staggering infinity was but a tiny mark upon a greater yardstick which Morgan sensed but could not apply with his intellectuality.

God was beyond, and beyond, and beyond—far beyond human thought of a billion intellects banded together and thinking in unison to try and solve Him. It was not this God that Morgan had cursed. He had not known about him. He had taken the little jealous God, full of evil, worse than a devil, for the real God.

He now knew that the little preachers had lied and slandered God. They were blasphemers against the real God. They had claimed to know all about him. They

were liars as well as blasphemers and hypocrites as well, many of them. Some, perhaps, had sensed the real God and tried to speak of Him. Others made their jabbering a day's work, something to do to earn bread to eat, not believing a word of which they preached.

Morgan gave God due credit. *There* was something big, something to amaze and stupefy his imagination, something to fear. The preachers had said he was playing favorites between men, counting hairs, toying with sparrows. They had made him smaller than themselves who used their time to pile up money and sneer at less wealthy men. They had also libeled Christ, the great humanitarian philosopher. They had made a joke of this lowly man by parading around in broadcloth and high hats, riding in costly carriages and twelve-cylinder automobiles, filling their bellies with the best in the land, fawning to the rich and snarling at the poor, while they preached the philosophy of this destitute wayfarer who had no place to lay his head, this man whose heart bled and who suffered intellectual and bodily crucifixion for mankind that groaned under tyrants' hands. Away with such as they! This, He Himself had shouted, plying the whip to their cringing backs in the temples and high places.

Bruce Morgan snarled as he thought how little men had tricked him into believing God was so small He could be cursed with impunity. They had tricked him with their arguments.

What did his little ego amount to in comparison with such schemes he had seen as he stumbled through the dismal swamp of the dark jungle? He had lived for money, had loved for it, married for it, had committed murders for it and had plotted the death of a loving wife for it. What did it amount to? Nothing.

He felt for the wallets of money in his pockets. He had trouble to get his hands into his pockets, they were so swollen. He had to take his other hand and rip the cloth apart to get a hand in. He drew out the wallets and the roll of bills. They were dank and wet and the pulpy paper stunk from the sweat of his body and the fowl swamp water that had soaked them.

He clawed the covers from the wallets. He tore the rubber bands from the roll of bills. He wadded the entire contents, all of the cash he possessed, into a huge ball in his two hands. He began to tear it to pieces, snarling curses at its filthiness as he did so. It was wet and pulled apart like rotted leaves. He threw it under foot and stamped it into the mud with his huge elephant feet until no tiny particle could be seen in the frothing loblolly under foot.

He pointed down at it and cursed it with loud rumbling oaths. He laughed at how impotent it was to answer him. He sprang upon it and stamped it again in a frenzy of anger that it had tricked him into believing it had power. It was no more powerful than the mud with which it mixed.

III

MORGAN crept along the tracks he had made as he first came from the river a week before until he came to the water. He sprang into the edge of the water and started floundering down-stream. He now wished to go in that direction.

He hugged the bank as closely as he could, skirting the stooping jungle that leaned out over the water. The water and mud was to his waist. Crawling and squirming things moved beneath his feet. He ran into sunken logs and snags and fell headlong. But each time he got up and headed down the stream.

Delirium gripped him more tightly. He gritted his clenched teeth as he separated the real from the unreal. The line that divided them was very flimsy and it was a strain to discriminate between the real monsters that lurked in the water, alligators, iguanas, giant toads, and salamanders, from the unreal phantasmagorial troop that were beginning to swarm in his brain.

He stumbled through rafts of dead bodies that had caught in the eddies, and when these cursed him from their bloated faces he howled vile curses back at them. It seemed that Guayaquil was a thousand miles away. He was like a man drunk with hasheesh who sees a year pass in the rising and falling of a footstep.

Yet he remained sane and kept his wits. He knew what he was doing. He knew he was going to Guayaquil if it took him a million years. He had business there that had to be attended to. It had been mapped out for him before the foundation of the

world began. The world's tomorrow century was God's yesterday clock-tick.

At last, after what seemed like ages, he came to a shelving bank where the women used to come to beat clothes to semi-whiteness upon some fallen tree-trunks. He tried to walk up this little slope but fell on his face from exhaustion. He crawled up, a monster of mud and slime from which the drowsing alligators fled in horror as he came among them.

He crawled along until he came to a narrow path that led to the end of a narrow street which was lined with cornstalk huts, thatched with grass, little houses of one tiny room.

He reeled to his knees and swayed giddily as he set his mind for the supreme effort of arising to his feet. He swayed around in a wide circle as he gained them, the ground appearing to rise around him on all sides. He beat at his temples with his great swollen hands to try and steady himself.

Finally he ceased to rock. He looked searchingly down the street. Far down it he could see the cathedral, rising above the housetops. He knew that it fronted the plaza which was the principal square of the city. He started in that direction.

IDA MORGAN, working among the reeking bodies with the help of a few native women who had come to her assistance, sorting out the living from the dead that lay in windrows, and dragging the living to the hospital she had improvised in the cathedral, looked up and gasped at the unearthly monster that came toward her.

She had been hand and glove with putrefaction and death for a week, but this thing that stumbled and reeled and gibbered toward her in the sunlight was more terrifying than anything she had seen. It was a thing of black flesh and rags, with wild hair and matted beard, staggering, stumbling, falling, but making headway in her direction. She would not have known it was human but for the fact that it walked half-upright with outstretched arms.

She shrank back and screamed as it confronted her. Its mouth opened and the tongue protruded between the black, frothing lips. Its throat worked convulsively, trying for speech. At last a single word came like a groan from the throat.

"I-da!"

"Bruce Morgan!" she screamed.

He tottered backward and fell in a sitting posture, holding his head in his hands, his eyes protruding like knobs as he strained to see her. She ran and supported him with an arm as she fell on her knees beside him. Low and gurgling came words from his throat. He was holding his sanity by a superhuman effort until he could utter them.

"I—loved—for—it—acted — a — part — for—it. I—have—paid—. The—money—is—gone. It—is—you—I now—care—for."

Sanity and consciousness both left him at the same time as his concentration snapped. This was the thing he had come to Guayaquil to do when he left the jungle. It was the thing that had given him strength to come. He was now in a dead faint.

Ida screamed hysterically and the women came running. They had stood gaping at the strange happening, dumfounded out of their wits, too terrified to move. They helped her bear him into the cathedral and on to one of the benches that were serving as beds.

Bruce Morgan had paid an installment, but he had not paid in full. The law of compensation is just and will not be cheated one tiny movement of the scales from the even balance. For weeks he raved in delirium. Coming out of this and gaining consciousness for a moment, he went off into other raving weeks. He had a dozen diseases and each of them now and then came to its pinnacle.

From the crises of yellow fever he passed to the crises of bubonic, which white men are not supposed to have. He broke out with small-pox. He vomited the black bile of blackwater fever. His body became spotted with painted fever. His lower legs cracked open and ran pus from elephantiasis. His upper legs were like solid, throbbing ivory with beriberi, as it clutched to the bone.

He burned up with fevers and he froze with reacting chills. Frothy blood slobbered from his nose and mouth, and his eyes were as running sores. His ears were the size of two swollen fists upon the side of his wart-covered head. Every cell of him was passing through the hell-fire of torment.

THE *alcalde*, mayor of the city and *jefe politico* of the surrounding district, came back as the plagues abated. He had found safety in flight to a small village across the river and beyond

Duran. The American consular agent came forth from his house, white as a ghost and tottering with a cane. He had fought through a case of yellow fever by himself. These two men now began to help Ida Morgan fight the remaining disease and pestilence.

Bodies were piled like cordwood, thousands in a pile, with no tally kept. They were burned with kerosene as they had been burned before during lighter scourges of pestilence.

An Indian runner, a Quichua slave, running the entire distance along the track from Quito to Duran, an incredible distance of two hundred and ninety-seven miles in twenty-four hours, reported that the former president and seven of his head generals had been captured and burned alive in one of the main squares of Quito, the capital of the republic, by a mob of men and women that the Federal soldiers claimed they were unable to hold in check when they brought in the prisoners. This ended the revolution to regain power for the former president.

A *cholo*, coming across in a rowboat from Duran, reported that an American hobo had come across the Andes from Brazil just in time to help "Chimborazo" Harmon get his road to running. They were then on the way from Rio Bamba with a train, the operator at Duran had reported, repairing the torn-up track with gangs of men they had recruited. A boat had steamed up the river and was dropping anchor below the slaughter-house. Guayaquil was beginning to convalesce from the pestilence.

But still Bruce Morgan raved in the little bamboo cottage people had set apart for him. And Ida Morgan tended him there. He was now her only patient. Gratitude is not unknown in this land, and men and women brought baskets of food and fruits and some of their most cherished possessions and left them on her porch.

The American consul came over each day and argued about sending her and her husband out on a tug he would bring down from Balboa in charge of a Zone doctor. She only smiled and shook her head.

Time passed until it was six months after Morgan had reeled into the city. Things were back to their normal state. He lay there like a thing without a soul, a mere animal fighting a subconscious fight to live and be sane. His flesh had swelled and withered and rotted. His skin had shed from him in huge flakes. He was a living skeleton. But the flesh that was building on him was firm and the new skin was white as ivory.

One day Ida Morgan propped him upon a pillow as if he had been a child and trimmed the shaggy mane and beard with a pair of scissors. She tried to lay him back but he struggled weakly until he sat bolt upright. His dim eyes began to grow bright as he studied her face. Then he smiled wanly. His mind had come back to him. He reached up and clasped her face in his thin, skinny hands. The tears were running from her eyes with gladness.

"Bruce, are you all right now?" she asked gently.

"Yes. I am a well man. It will be only a short time until I shall be up."

Then he gasped as he looked more closely at her.

"You are strong as an oak!"

She laughed half hysterically.

"I haven't coughed for three months. I seem to get stronger each day. By some chance I have escaped."

Then she stammered and blushed.

"I guess I'll need a little extra strength. I want the little fellow—to be strong—like its big daddy——"

"—used to be and will be again," finished Bruce for her.

Then he muttered half to himself as she turned to look after the broth on the charcoal stove:

"I was a strong man, all right, but God knocked me for a goal. I schemed and I plotted but He had me figured out before I began. In the future I'm going to make my little plots fit in with the master plots He's working at, yesterday, tomorrow, a million years ago."

His thin lips lifted and he grinned until his big white teeth showed in two broad rows.

"Hope it's a boy," he said to his wife teasingly.

HAVE you heard that they have cleaned up Guayaquil? Has the news come to you that they have pumped in sand and raised the city several feet above the level of the river; that they have a modern sewerage system; sanitary inspectors that make the daily rounds as they do in Panama; that they have a beautiful hospital that seldom has more than a

dozen patients in it? Do you know that the city is healthy and fit to live in?

Wise ones said it could not be done in Guayaquil. They said it was the place that God forgot. But it has been done.

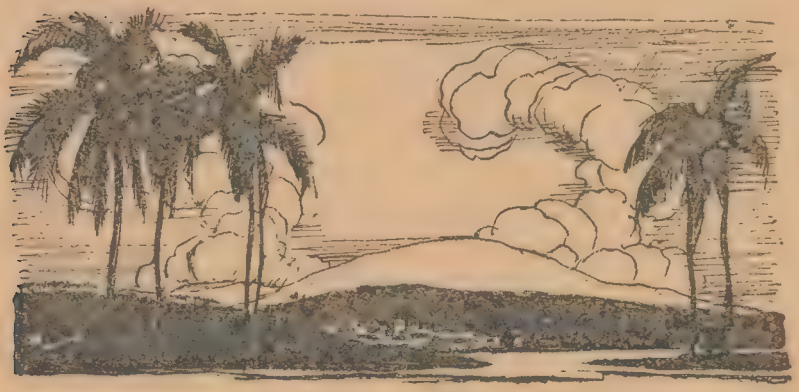
Down the West Coast they have passed the word along that it is a sort of a paradise up the Guayas at Guayaquil now and that the people of the highlands come down to spend their vacations there. The native papers of the country speak of it as the "Pearl of the West Coast." They have quarantined ships coming from Colombia many times recently in Guayaquil, and even a few from Peru. The coast cities of these two countries are beginning to jealously regard this growing city of 75,000 which has a commerce that is amazing. Guyaquil is shouting her cleanness to the world and the world is giving her credit.

All this has been done since the year of 1912, and that was the year Bruce Morgan landed there. He is a modest man and would not think of accepting credit for it all. He admits that he helped a great deal by hounding every official and politician he could buttonhole and bringing business friendships to bear upon it. He also says he wrote hundreds of letters to papers and made a few soap-box speeches in the plaza. But he grinningly says it was from purely selfish reasons.

He says the climate actually agreed with his wife and he did not want to see her leave on his account. Then later there was Little Bruce, the polyglot, the red-headed one whom the street urchins called *"Pequeño."* It wouldn't do for him to be sick. He rolls in the streets with white, yellow, and black youngsters without discrimination.

Big Bruce claims it was selfishness. But there is a woman who regards each of his actions with shining eyes. This is Ida who appears to grow younger each day as she goes about among her Ecuadorian friends and speaks to them the wisdom of the great republic to the north where she was born. She hasn't yet got so she can speak the language without mispronouncing it, but they never laugh at a stranger who mispronounces their tongue. And so far as she is concerned there would be a war if any one tried to criticise anything she did. And Bruce numbers his friends by the thousand.

Tropical tramps who have been there recently claim he sought them out and gave them money and rustled them up a job, that he is a man with the soul of a Christ who uses the fortune that comes to him annually from his cacao and vanilla plantations to better the lot of his fellow men. Perhaps that is what the Master Plotter intended when He made him bad enough to take a woman there to die. You can't get away from Him. He's a bear when it comes to plotting out things.



Old Fellows

By Russell A. Boggs

Author of "Agent Andy," "The Wild and Wooly East," etc.

GILMAN, the white-haired superintendent of the Second Division of the O. S. & D. Railroad, hitched his chair a trifle closer to his desk; a movement which unmistakably was meant to indicate to the caller that the superintendent considered the interview as closed.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Morrow," he said briskly; "but it's been our invariable custom to hire no new man over fifty."

David Morrow, standing at the far side of Gilman's desk, regarded the superintendent for an instant with a somewhat whimsical, tolerant gaze. Then abruptly his big six-foot body stiffened erect and an impatient expression came into his noticeably fine gray eyes—the eyes of a philosophical observer who has observed much; the big fingers that clutched his worn felt hat moved with an impetuous gesture.

"I'm weary of that song!" he declared directly. "No one over fifty in this place; no one over forty-five in that! What do you think a man is, anyway; what kind of an animal? Is he like a horse, that you look at his teeth and then figure how many more years of service he'll be good for? Doesn't anything but years count?"

Gilman, surprized by the unexpectedness of the volley, looked up into Morrow's face. The latter, despite the rapidity of his sentences, appeared composed enough. Only the lines of his clean hard jaw were set a little sharper and straighter than usual.

"A poor way," responded the superintendent coldly, "to attempt to impress a man with one's fitness for a job."

"To —— with your job," returned Morrow promptly and cheerfully. "I'll get one somewhere, mark that."

An amused light flickered in his wise eyes for a second.

"I'm merely saying these things for the good of your soul, and because I happen to feel like saying 'em. Chiefly the latter, I expect."

His hand rested lightly on the edge of Gilman's desk; he bent forward a trifle.

"You say your limit is fifty," he said. "I've told you that I am fifty-five. How old are you?"

"This is all foolishness!" protested Gilman showing some signs of irritation. "All to no purpose."

"You've got me beat ten full years," declared Morrow, ignoring Gilman's protest. "At least ten years. Suppose some younger man gets after your job; suppose he gets it; and suppose that everybody should answer you as you've answered me! What'll you do then?"

A quick change came over the superintendent's face, as if Morrow's words had touched a vulnerable, tender spot; as if they had caught him off his guard and had gone deep, prodding into his most secret trouble. The effect was almost startling, so suddenly did the alteration take place.

The change in Gilman's countenance was

not lost on Morrow; he was swift to notice it, to perceive that his thrust had gone home.

"Ah," he said quietly, "there is then a younger man after your place."

His eyes now, as he regarded the white-haired superintendent, had lost whatever gleam of contentiousness they may hitherto have held and rested on Gilman with entire, almost solicitous sympathy.

"But perhaps," he went on in a hopeful voice, "perhaps you've got your nest well lined, well stocked against rough weather; you'll not be caring so much in that case."

The worried look on Gilman's face did not alter. He sat silent, his brow wrinkled—either oblivious to Morrow's presence or careless of the fact that the other man viewed his dejection. Plainly he had found no comfort in Morrow's last words; the obvious deduction was that the nest was not well lined. He looked old, careworn.

For a moment Morrow stood looking down at the aged superintendent, his air that of extreme concern.

"I'm sorry, old man," he said then, his voice gentle, friendly. "I hope everything works out all right for you."

He stepped quietly toward the door, reached it and turned the latch. He glanced around and smiled encouragement at the gloomy superintendent.

"You buck up!" he advised Gilman. "You buck up and show that young candidate, whoever he is, that all we old fellows are not dead yet. Lay into him! Step high!"

The door closed behind him.

II

IN THE midnight quiet of Bellemore yards Dave Morrow, sedulously keeping to the shadows, drew near to the head end of Number Five—the O. S. & D.'s crack limited. Quiet is of course merely comparative—Bellemore yard is never entirely that; but at midnight it probably is as quiet as at any hour of the twenty-four; perhaps even more.

It was the blind baggage of Number Five that Dave sought; a precarious place of vantage between tender and first coach. He was minded to leave Bellemore, since of jobs there for him there seemed to be an absolute lack.

The night was opressively dark—thick, heavy with fog and a steadily increasing drizzle. He made his way carefully, pausing now and then to get his bearings. He arrived within thirty feet of his objective and for a moment shrank back into the blackness between two coupled box cars standing on a siding adjacent to the track on which the limited stood. He peered sharply about, striving to perceive if the coast was clear for the final few steps which separated him from the place he wished to attain.

As he stood between the two cars he heard what sounded like cautious footsteps gently crunching the ashes which lined the spaces between the various sidings. He drew back still farther into the darkness. Then, almost at his ear, a voice spoke guardedly; an extremely low voice, not much above a whisper.

"I've got it fixed," the careful voice said. "I'll pull it at Headland tonight."

In absolute silence Dave shrank back against the couplings which held the two box cars together. Another man's voice spoke.

"Don't fail," said this second man, guardedly as the first. "You're positive you've got everything lined up right?" The speaker seemed anxious.

The men were, Morrow judged, standing within arm's length of him—just around the corner of one of the cars. He could not see either of them; but he could, in a way, feel their proximity.

"Dead sure!" the first man answered. "I'll not fail."

He gave a short, quick ejaculation, as if he were in some way amused.

"We'll give Old Whitey another thing to worry about!"

"We will that," said the second man. "But you'd better be getting aboard; Five will be leaving soon. I'll slide in here and wait till she pulls out."

There was a quick movement, and before Dave could budge a man had stepped in between the two cars where he already stood. This man bumped into Dave in the narrow space which separated the cars. He stepped back with an expression of surprize.

"What the devil!" he exclaimed, his voice now raised above the guarded pitch he had been maintaining.

His speech was quick, with a certain sharp incisiveness.

"Who are you? What are you doing here?"

But Dave, without a word and without the loss of a single instant, had sprung to the top of the couplings and had dropped to the other side by the time the speaker had completed his questions. He at once started to glide away along the far side of the cars. There was a little stir near the spot he had just left.

"What is it?" he heard some one ask—the man whose words had first startled him.

This man's voice also was raised now, so that Morrow clearly caught its tone and inflection.

"What's the trouble?"

"There was a man in here—between the cars!" the other man replied swiftly. "He's hopped over to the other side!"

His voice plainly revealed his concern.

"Shall I try to nail him—" began the man who had first spoken.

But just then there was a slow hissing of steam from the cylinders of Number Five's engine and the coaches slowly started to move. The man's voice was silent suddenly. Dave guessed that he must have hastened to climb on the departing train. He tarried an instant, listening to the sound of the trundling wheels.

"I expect I'll not be taking Number Five tonight," ruminated Dave, with calm philosophy.

He shook his head in the darkness.

"No, not tonight."

He kept moving slowly, not now much concerned by the fear of detection. Too black a night for that, he reflected. His mind was chiefly taken up with the conversation he had overheard; with speculation upon its import.

He came to another halt after a few minutes and gazed down through the yards toward the big, many-storied building whose lower floor served as Bellemore depot and whose upper floors were occupied with division headquarters officers. Here and there in the upper stories lights twinkled brightly where dispatchers and other night workers held forth. He became abruptly aware of the fact that the drizzle had become a steady rain, much heavier than when he had first ventured forth that night. His coat, he discovered, would soon be wet through if he remained much longer away from shelter.

"Probably just as well I missed that rattler," he told himself. "A miserable night."

He turned up his coat collar and moved down toward Bellemore station.

"I'll hunt a dry spot," he decided.

III

JERRY BOYLE, the night man in the boiler room down in the basement of Bellemore's O. S. & D. depot, shifted his eyes from the steam-gage to Dave Morrow as the latter entered at the door marked "Private—Keep Out." Jerry's gaze was cold as he contemplated this stranger.

"Mind if I dry out a bit, neighbor?" said Dave pleasantly as he advanced. "A wet night out, and I got pretty near a soaking."

"Hump!" grunted Jerry.

He was silent then until Morrow had come farther into the light of the electric bulb which dangled near the firebox door. Jerry was naturally a friendly soul; but you never could tell about strangers. However, when he perceived that the visitor was a man almost as old as himself and that his clothing in truth was sagging with dampness he at once thawed considerably.

"Guess not," grumbled Jerry.

Dave at once drew near to the warmth and turned his back gratefully to the boiler. The steam rose from him in little vaporous clouds.

"Ah, that's good!" he said. "That's good!"

Five minutes, ten minutes passed; then fifteen minutes; and still Boyle puttered around without further speech—testing steam-cocks, throwing in a few shovels of coal, poking and scraping his fire with long rods and hooks. He did finally pause though, looked at Morrow and jerked his thumb over his shoulder.

"Bench over there," he offered.

Dave had noticed the wooden bench over near the wall. He drew it a little nearer the firebox door and sat down.

"Thanks," he said. "That does go better."

He regarded Boyle quietly.

"I was going to go out on Number Five tonight," he said, as if he felt that explanations somehow were due. "But something turned up and prevented. Just as well, I expect. It's better here."

He spread his hands appreciatively in the warmth.

Boyle merely nodded and set aside his

shovel. He came back near the bench on which Dave sat and began to load his pipe. He extended the pouch to Morrow.

"Smoke?"

"I wouldn't mind," said Dave, and drawing a short pipe from his pocket proceeded to fill the bowl.

A minute later, side by side upon the bench, the two of them contentedly drew on their stems. Dave watched a ring curl upward.

"Who's Old Whitey?" he asked abruptly.

If there was one thing Jerry Boyle enjoyed, next to his pipe, it was a bit of gossip and a chance to show his intimate knowledge of men and affairs.

"Old Whitey?" he said, cocking his eyes aslant at Dave. "Why, that's the old man—Superintendent Gilman."

"Ummh!" said Dave. "I see."

He exhaled a thoughtful puff.

"I heard a man mention the name," he explained. "I was just wondering."

Boyle slowly tamped his bowl with his finger.

"If you meant to ride on the outside of Number Five tonight it's right you are in saying it's just as well that you didn't get on," he said. "The bulls would sure have picked you up."

"That so?" said Dave with interest.

"Yes," affirmed Jerry, pleased to reveal his knowledge. "One of them's been riding the rods or the blind baggage every night for the last three weeks or better; ever since the night Five developed six hot-boxes."

"Six hot-boxes!" said Dave. "Well, now! How was that?"

Jerry Boyle crossed his knees and leaned a few inches nearer to Morrow. Here was too good a chance to miss; much too good a chance to display how well versed he was in the O. S. & D.'s affairs.

"I'll tell you," he said knowingly. "I'll tell you just how it is, and was.

"In the first place," he went on, "you must know that there's an old saying on the O. S. & D.—an old saying about Number Five that's always turned out true. It's this:

> "Past three delays within thirty days,
> No superintendent ever stays."

Jerry squinted over at Dave. "Do you get that?"

Dave slowly repeated the words.

"I believe I do," he answered then. "It means that if Number Five is delayed three times within thirty days on a division the superintendent of that division is then given the boot. Am I right?"

"You are," asserted Jerry. "The O. S. & D. is mighty sweet on Number Five; it's safer to do 'most anything else than to knock her off her schedule. The saying's been proved out eight or nine times in the last ten years.

"That's why Old Whitey's so skittish about it just now; because of the six hot-boxes I was telling you about. Yes, sir, six all at one time. A strange sight she must have been, highballing through the night with them six fires blazing.

"They all popped out on this division, mind, and she lost a plumb half-hour on the head of it, what with stopping to douse the blaze and trying to pack the boxes and one thing and another. I've heard it said, too, that the dope in the boxes was found wonderfully dry; that there was scarce any oil at all in it. I've heard that, I'm telling you. Myself, I couldn't prove it."

Boyle paused long enough for a few whiffs.

"There must be something in it," he continued, "for Old Whitey at once puts the bull on Number Five. Every night the officer goes with the limited over the division. The hot-boxes happened, as I said, over three weeks ago. There's been no delay since."

He counted on his fingers.

"Four weeks tonight," he corrected then. "This makes the twenty-eighth. If Number Five gets by this night and the next two, Old Whitey will be safe—for another spell anyway."

"One in twenty-seven," said Dave, screwing up his brow meditatively.

He was thinking of the conversation he had heard in the yards, and he was speaking to himself more than to his companion. He began to believe that he was getting some light on the matter.

"Tonight will make two in twenty-eight," he decided abruptly.

But he kept this conclusion to himself and rose to his feet.

"I must go up-stairs for a minute," he said to Boyle as he moved to the door. "But I'll likely be back; if you don't mind?"

"I'll not," said Jerry.

A few minutes later, on the third floor, Dave opened the door of the dispatchers' room. On either side of the office sat a

dispatcher; one for the west end, the other for the east end of the division. The man nearer the door looked up sharply as Morrow stuck his head in; he was frowning deeply.

"There'll be a delay to Number Five at Headland tonight," announced Dave mildly. "I'm pretty certain of it."

"There will be!" snapped the dispatcher, holding his key open. "There is now! I've just heard!"

He glared in puzzled anger at the man in the doorway.

"But how did you know?" he demanded suspiciously.

"It just happened so," replied Dave.

He withdrew his head, shut the door and quickly retreated down the stairway.

"Too late to do any good," he complained as he hastened toward the basement and Jerry Boyle. "Was afraid so."

He came to the last flight of steps.

"Oh, well, I did my best."

The dispatcher meanwhile had reached for the telephone at his elbow and had called the night man in the office of the O. S. & D's captain of police. The night man came hurrying to the dispatchers' room, listened a moment to what was told him there, then began to look around for a tall man of about fifty or so.

But the officer looked in vain, although he peeped into almost every room in the building but the boiler room.

Down there Dave was saying to Jerry—

"I'll spell you."

He grasped a long poker, prodded the fire, threw in some coal—expertly.

"I've done this before. What do you say?"

"Well," acquiesced Jerry, "all right. I guess a little nap won't hurt me. One hour on and one off."

"So be it," said Dave.

But he let Jerry sleep on the bench for four straight hours.

IV

IT WAS near eight o'clock the next morning, or rather the same morning, when Dave Morrow appeared at the door of Superintendent Gilman's office. A sleek young clerk confronted him there as he was about to enter.

"No," replied the sleek young man to Dave's inquiry, "Mr. Gilman is not in just now. Yes, we're expecting him some time this morning, but we can't say just when he'll arrive; maybe an hour or two before he comes. His chief clerk is in, though; wouldn't he do?"

The young man pointed over to another door.

"No, son; he won't do," returned Dave. "It's Mr. Gilman I must see. I'll wait."

Calmly he brushed the spick-and-span youth aside, opened the door of Gilman's office and entered. The young clerk stared for a moment as the door closed behind Morrow. Then with a shrug he moved off.

"Cool old bird," he soliloquized. "Well, I should worry."

Inside the deserted office of the superintendent Dave looked about. It was a big enough office, but gloomy at the best. There was but a single light burning low, over near Gilman's desk. The office was irregular in shape, and over in a sort of little alcove in the far corner of the room were several leather-seated armchairs.

"I'll take one of these, thanks," said Dave; and choosing the one most protected from the light he sat down, patiently to await Gilman's coming.

He had been seated but a few moments when his eyes grew heavy, the warm air of the room starting to get in its work—this on top of the loss of sleep due to his long relief of Jerry Boyle. He forced his lids open several times. But the chair was too comfortable; he fell asleep, his head propped in the open palm of his right hand.

He was awakened by voices in the office. His eyes popped open and he perceived that the light over Gilman's desk now was glowing brightly. Gilman himself stood there, his hat still on as if he had just come in. He was speaking to a much younger man—a spruce, full-cheeked young man of probably thirty who stood just across from him.

Morrow's chair was still in the shadow. Obviously his presence had not been noticed.

"Yes," the white-haired superintendent was saying, "I understand that Number Five was delayed twenty minutes at Headland last night, by a dragging brake-beam."

His words were abrupt, almost belligerent.

"Is that all you have to tell me, Mr. Wilkey? Have you no details of the affair? Was any cause found, or was it just an—accident?"

His voice hung with a sort of challenge over the last word.

"To all appearances it was just that—a plain accident," returned the younger man smoothly, his words coming sharp and quick. "No evidence of tampering was found whatever. The break-beam simply seems to have worked loose and dropped, as they sometimes will. Fortunate, too, that Officer Bremner discovered it when he did. Something serious might easily have come from it."

As the sharp, quick intonations of that incisive voice reached his ears Dave Morrow was indeed glad that his chair was so deeply in the shadow. He sank deeper between its arms, ardently hoping that his presence would continue to be overlooked.

He had no fear that Mr. Wilkey would be able to recognize the man whom he had bumped into down in the yards; but Dave did want to hear more. He waited expectantly. No mistaking that voice, he was thinking.

"Officer Bremner must be given proper credit, of course," said Gilman as Wilkey paused.

His words were singularly cold and noncommittal.

"And that is all you know?"

His eyes rested steadily on Wilkey.

"Yes," replied the younger man. "That's all I know."

He spread his hands expressively.

"It's all there is to know."

His voice was confident, almost condescending.

Gilman's eyes grew harder for a moment.

"You realize, of course, that this is the second delay to Number Five—within less than a month?" he said. "Naturally I am concerned. You know what the custom is, what the probable result will be if another delay occurs within the next day or two."

Morrow, in his chair, was a little surprized at this frankness. Then he repressed an inward chuckle: Old Whitey was making a play of showing his hand, thinking to draw Wilkey on. He waited to see how the play would work.

"I do," answered Wilkey promptly. "And I would of course be extremely sorry to see anything like you suggest happen."

But he would not be sorry—the badly covered note of exultation in his voice left no doubt of that. His expression of concern was as perfidious, as false as his own scheming brain. Dave's heart warmed to Old Whitey and his cleverness.

A short silence fell, during which Gilman continued to regard Wilkey with unwavering eyes. Then quickly the superintendent turned, drew his chair up to his desk, removed his hat and sat down.

"That will be all then, Mr. Wilkey," he said briefly. "Do what you can."

"Certainly," returned Wilkey with like brevity.

He turned at once and strode out of the office. There was something approaching a swagger in his walk as he departed.

As the door closed behind Wilkey Dave rose to his feet.

"There goes an ambitious young man," he observed quietly.

Gilman looked up swiftly, his astonishment most manifest as Morrow advanced toward his desk. Then as the light fell more distinctly on Dave the supertendent recognized him.

"You're back again!" said Gilman.

"I am," responded Dave. "You see," he explained, "I fell asleep in that chair while waiting for you. Your voices, as you and Mr. Wilkey talked, wakened me."

His tone grew apologetic.

"Possibly I shouldn't have listened. But I had a particular, a peculiar reason for doing so. I think I can make it all clear. I was just starting to when I referred to Mr. Wilkey as an ambitious young man."

"What you are driving at may be very clear to you," said Gilman. "It is not so to me."

"It will be in just a few minutes," replied Morrow evenly. "But first I'm wondering if you'll agree with me that Mr. Wilkey has aspirations?"

"Perhaps," said the superintendent shortly.

"You'll remember something was said yesterday about a certain man being after your job," continued Dave tranquilly. "It's needless to look farther. I've seen the man: Mr. Wilkey."

The superintendent sat back in his chair, his face betokening general perplexity and some surprize.

"What are you talking at?" he cried. "What are you trying to do?"

Morrow, standing across from Gilman as he had stood the previous afternoon, looked the superintendent squarely in the eyes.

"I'm trying to help," he said.

There was a certain dignity in his quiet voice and in his deep-set gray eyes that had its effect on the superintendent.

"I've something for your ear; something I believe you'll wish to hear. I'd like to tell it."

He waited, as if for some sign to proceed.

"I'll be pleased if you will," said Gilman, moved to sudden graciousness.

He pointed to a chair.

"Won't you sit down?"

MORROW drew the chair forward and sat down. He rested one arm easily on the desk.

"Last night," he began, "I had it in mind to leave here on Number Five without a ticket; you'll know what I mean. But while I waited between two box cars right close to Five's coaches, I heard one man say to another:

" 'I've got it fixed. I'll pull it at Headland tonight.' "

Dave paused to note the effect on the superintendent. Gilman was bending toward him eagerly.

"Well?" pressed the superintendent.

"And then the second man said:

" 'Don't fail! You're positive you've got everything lined up right?' "

"Go on," urged Gilman as Morrow again paused.

"Then the first man replied:

" 'Dead sure! I'll not fail. We'll give Old Whitey another thing to worry about.' "

"And the response of the second man to that was:

" 'We will that. But you'd better be getting aboard; Five will be leaving soon. I'll slide in here and wait till she pulls out.' "

Gilman said nothing for a moment; but plainly his brain was busy.

"You heard that!" he said then grimly.

"Aye," said Dave.

"And would you—would you know either of the men—or both of them?" Gilman's voice was controlled but tense.

"I would know one of them—the second man," said Dave. "He left this office not five minutes since. I recognized his voice when he was speaking to you."

"Ah," said the superintendent.

His eyes fell to his desk and for a little time he appeared to be studying its oaken top.

"An ambitious young man," said Morrow.

"Yes," said Gilman. "And the first man?"

"Not until I hear him speak again," returned Dave.

He might have added that he could have made a strong guess; but he felt that was not necessary; Gilman, too, he believed, had a pretty straight idea along that line.

The superintendent seemed to have an inspiration.

"I wouldn't wonder but what you are the man who tried to warn the dispatcher last night," he said.

"I expect I am," admitted Morrow. "Too late though."

Gilman nodded.

"Yes; Number Five was hung up at Headland for twenty minutes."

"So I heard you tell Mr. Wilkey," said Dave. "I could say also that I've heard that interesting little couplet which runs, 'Past three delays within thirty days no superintendent ever stays.' That makes two within twenty-eight days.

"You'll notice I've heard about the six hot boxes, too. You've two to go."

"Two to go," affirmed Gilman.

He appeared to reflect for a little space, as if debating.

"Would you mind saying just why you've bothered to tell me what you know?"

"I wanted to help if I could," replied Dave.

"Yes, I understand that," said the superintendent. "But just why did you want to help me?"

Dave smiled gently.

"We old fellows must stick together," he said. "Got to give one another a boost when things get in a jam."

Gilman contemplated him with considerable intentness. A little flush crept into the superintendent's cheeks.

"You're right," he said. "We should. But I wonder at you, considering that I turned you down yesterday."

"Oh, that," said Dave, "was nothing."

He waved his hand.

"Nothing."

Gilman was silent, again studying the top of his desk.

"You know," he said presently, "I am in a proper jam. I'm going to be candid with you, as you've been with me."

"I'll be pleased," murmured Morrow.

"As you say," continued Gilman, "this man Wilkey is ambitious. He's trainmaster

now; but he wants to sit here in my place; and he's being backed in his aspirations by a certain general superintendent.

"That makes it easier for the trainmaster. All he has to do is to produce some good excuse for disposing of me; then it will be velvet for him.

"He watches my every move—watches for every slip-up. But slyly, very slyly. I know it though, so I mind my step; and I've been so far pretty successful in hanging on.

"But these delays to Number Five are different propositions. I've felt Wilkey is behind them, and now in my mind your evidence proves it. I'm grateful. And yet how am I going to prevent another delay?"

"I understand, I believe," said Dave. "If it came up for a test, for a showdown, it would simply be my word against his; you've no other conclusive evidence to offer. A blind man could see how that would end; the word of a trainmaster against that of a trespasser, a hobo in the yards!"

He nodded.

"It would merely make you look ridiculous: it would be absurd."

"Exactly," stated Gilman. "No offense meant, you know; but you've put it precisely."

"And yet," said Dave quickly as if struck by an afterthought, "I told that dispatcher just about the time the second delay happened. That might help some, might show I'd really heard something."

"It might," said Gilman slowly, "but I'd be afraid of it. What would prevent Wilkey from declaring it was a frame-up on him? What if he should intimate that I, wishing to get rid of him through fear of his ability and so on, had taken this means of discrediting him; that I really had had a hand in the delay, you being an accomplice?

"In this way he'd present the thing from an angle directly opposite to mine; and the general officials wouldn't forget that he was a trainmaster, while you were a trespasser. Be like him, too: he's full of craft."

"Probably you're right," acquiesced Dave. "That's good reasoning."

"So then it all comes down to this," said Gilman. "I'm in charge of this division and it's up to me to see that Five goes through on time. The train is the O. S. & D's pride, its gage of efficiency. The big officials don't inquire too closely as to who besides myself is actually responsible for the delays. If some one under me falls down that is my lookout, not theirs; I'm the one they hold to account. I'd have to get stronger proof than I now can produce; have to catch the schemers red-handed, you might say. Anyway one more delay within the next forty-eight hours and out I go; that's flat."

He made a sour face.

"I've been hearing from the general offices this morning."

"Forewarned, you know," encouraged Dave.

"It helps," agreed Gilman. "Be assured I'll do my best. I'm going to put forward some measures prompted by what you've told me. I appreciate what you've done."

"A trifle," protested Morrow.

"It's not a trifle," declared Gilman. "And I'm going to tell you what I want you to do. I want you to forget all I said yesterday about age limits; I want you to take a job, here with me."

Dave stared at him a moment. Then abruptly he leaned back in his chair and burst into a round of uproarious merriment.

"Ho, ho!" he choked, gulping. "Just listen to the man! Here I drop in to pass him a friendly word, and he must offer me a job! Man, can't you get that out of your head? I don't want your job!"

He paused to wipe the tears from his eyes.

Gilman was gaping at him amazement.

"I don't see—" he began.

"I know you don't!" broke in Dave. "I wish you did. Old-timer, did you really think I was sore for any personal reason when you turned me down yesterday? Not a bit of it! You misunderstood me; I was objecting to your system only."

He began checking off on his fingers.

"Let's see. I've swung a pick, washed windows, pounded brass, been a shack, been a fireman, drove team, been a waiter, sold books, painted some, been a steel-worker, a deck-hand——"

He broke off.

"I've probably missed some," he said. "But that'll give you a pretty fair idea of my various lines. And now do you actually think that because you wouldn't give me a place on your nice little railroad I'm so awfully disappointed that I'll go jump in the river?"

Gilman's countenance was a study. Embarrassment was its outstanding feature. This gentle chaffing had rather got him.

"Of course," he stumbled, "of course—you know I mean well."

"I know you do," assured Dave, grinning amiably.

He rose from his chair and moved a step toward the door.

"Well," he said, "I guess that's all. I'll be going."

"I'm sorry—" commenced the still disconcerted superintendent.

"Don't be," interrupted Dave.

He now stood at the door.

"I'm wishing you all good fortune, for the next two days and always. Do what I said yesterday. Show some kick! Some pep!"

"Thanks," said Gilman. "Thanks for everything——"

"Tut, tut!" said Dave.

He swung the door open.

"*Au revoir!*" he cried gaily, and went out.

V

DAVE MORROW had better luck that night. He caught a west-bound freight that pulled out of Bellemore yards around ten o'clock—about two hours ahead of Number Five's time of departure.

It was much more pleasant than the previous night, when he had failed to catch Number Five, had been. It was not overly cool and a moon half full occasionally peeped between the lazy clouds which floated across the sky.

"This is not so bad," said Dave as he settled down in an empty box car not far removed from the engine. "Not bad at all."

The train clicked out of the yards and on to the main line. He heard some one tramp over the car roof above his head; a brakeman, doubtless, seeking the caboose.

"Now if everything goes well I'll be considerably on my way by morning," ruminated Dave, disposing himself on the bare floor as comfortably as possible. "Can't say where that is; but small odds it makes."

His thoughts dwelt upon Gilman and Gilman's troubles. He was leaving, he supposed, the superintendent and his perplexities all behind him; but he couldn't keep from cogitating upon them.

"Well," he decided, "I guess I did about all I could. The old boy surely has got his hands full, and things to worry about. Small wonder he turned me down that first day; all that stuff on his mind. Not such a bad old scout, after all. He's all right.

"That slippery Mr. Wilkey, now; too bad somebody doesn't hand him what he needs. Yes; him and and a certain one other."

He dozed off soon after that, waking a little over two hours later to discover that the extra freight had stopped. Up ahead he heard the engine puffing and concluded they must either be setting off or picking up cars.

In a few minutes there was a gentle jarring as the engine was coupled to the train again. The whistle sounded for the flagman. A minute later he heard two en speaking near his door; the conductor and a brakeman, judging from their conservation.

"Tell the eagle-eye to keep her rolling," said the one who must have been the conductor. "W want to get into Springs Siding in good time to clear Number Five. There'll be the devil to pay if we hold her up."

"I'll tell him," answered the other.

Their voices ceased and Morrow heard their feet crunching in the cinders—the one man going toward the head end, the other toward the rear. Then directly the train started to move ahead.

Another period of sleep and Dave awoke to find the freight headed into what he decided was Springs Siding. Standing in the doorway of his box car, he held his watch in a patch of light which the moon for a moment kindly put forth; it was near to two o'clock. He did not know just how far they had come, but he imagined that Number Five would be showing up soon.

"Hope she gets through on the dot tonight," reflected Dave. "Bet I know where Old Whitey's thoughts are just now, too. Now if I were him I swear I'd ride that limited myself for a few nights and see what I could see. But not him, I reckon; too old, he'd think."

Dave sniffed a little.

"Too old—like thunder!"

It was a long siding, capable of holding two such trains as the freight on which Morrow rode. Midway down its length stood a water-tank, rising between the siding and the west-bound main track. It had two spouts; one for engines on the siding, the other for engines on the main line.

At the tank the engine paused and the capricious moon revealed to Dave that the tender was being filled with water. Down

at the other end he perceived that the caboose had cleared the end of the siding. The switch-light there blinked from red to green as the switch was closed. The extra was in the clear for Number Five.

Morrow lounged in the sheltering obscurity of his doorway, idly meditating. He noted that his car was now but the fourth from the engine, whereas when they left Bellemore it had been about the tenth; they must have set some cars off at the stop where he had first wakened.

A quarter of an hour passed. Then far down the track to the east he heard a deep whistle; Number Five was coming.

A headlight flashed around a distant curve, and the limited's long string of lighted coaches came into view. The rails of the main line trembled and hummed. With a roar of escaping steam Number Five drew alongside the freight.

He was interested to notice that the limited had slowed up; that it was stopping at the tank to take on water. He had not known that the train would stop there, had not given any thought to the possibility of its doing so. But after all there was nothing at all singular about it. He watched the fireman scamper to the top of the tender and pull down the water-spout.

A shadow moved on the far side of the coach directly opposite Morrow—it happening to be the baggage-coach. His eye caught the movement, but he at first thought it had been caused by a passing cloud.

The shadow moved again, however, and as the moon at the moment peeped forth brighter he saw what looked like a hand and arm stretched under the draw-head at the front end of the car. Dave squeezed quickly into the deeper gloom at the side of his doorway.

It was a hand and arm and it moved again, slowly, carefully; and Dave now perceived that the hand clutched some dark object about eighteen inches long, some wedge-shaped object which from several inches thick at the big end tapered down to a sharp point at the other end. Silently, cautiously this wedge-shaped thing was laid on top of the rail ahead of the baggage car's front wheel on the side next to Morrow, point to the rear, then was slid tightly up against the wheel. The hand and arm were withdrawn; the object on the rail remained where it had been placed.

The darkness was deeper at the far side of the coach. Nevertheless Morrow was able to see the shadow moving there, the mysterious hand and arm placing something on the far rail—doubtless the same kind of thing as had first been placed on the rail next to the box car.

The movements around the truck ceased; the shadow vanished. Only an instant did Dave stare, his busy brain puzzling out what these sinister movements could mean. Then he grasped it.

"To derail her!" he ejaculated. "Up the wheels go and off they go? Oh, boy, let's be moving!"

Down he jumped from his box car, landing with surprizing lightness on his feet. In about three leaps he had gained the head end of the baggage-car.

He stooped; his fingers grasped the wedge-shaped thing sticking under the curve of the front wheel. He jerked it out. It was formed of wood—seasoned hickory wood, hard as iron.

"Clever, by Judas!" exclaimed Dave. "Easy made, easy carried, easy hid afterward! Got to give 'em credit!"

But he didn't delay. He was over the coupled draw-heads and down on the other side of the car like a flash. He kicked, and a triangular shaped piece like the one he held in his hand was dislodged from under the curve of the front wheel on that side of the car. As it fell Number Five's whistle roared for the flagman.

"Good enough!" said Dave. "Now let 'er roll!"

He glanced toward the rear, seeking the elusive placer of derailing devices. He could see the flagman's lanterns bobbing in the distance; and between himself and the bobbing lanterns he could see two men hurrying forward alongside the train. Could it have been either of those two?

He shot a swift glance ahead. He saw a sly head pop out of sight around the far corner of the express-car—the car directly ahead of the baggage-car. That was the man! Dave ran forward.

"Come down, you rat!" he called to the man flattened against the end of the express-coach.

The only answer was a sort of snarled oath. Dave put his foot on the iron step at the corner and was up in a wink. With one big hand he grasped the fellow's arm.

"Let go, you fool!" cried the man. "I'm an officer!"

"You may be now, but you'll not be long!" promised Dave.

He pulled, putting his strength into it, and together they tumbled from the car, down between the tracks.

There was a kicking of heels, a tumbling and a rolling, blows struck. The fellow was active and strong. But Dave still had in his hand the piece of hickory wood. A few taps on the head with that and the other man began to be persuaded.

"Be good, eh?" grunted Morrow as the fellow eased up in his struggling.

Seated astride, Dave held him down by placing the fingers on his left hand about his throat.

"Who is the pup that put you up to all this dirt?" demanded Morrow then; he brandished his wooden weapon in air with his right hand. "Speak up, officer, or I'll crown you again—and not easy either! What's his name, I say?"

"You wouldn't—" panted the under man, squirming beneath the menace of Morrow's flourished club.

"I would!" assured Dave.

He increased the pressure of his left hand.

"Tell me, quick—or down she comes!"

"Wilkey!" gasped the prisoner. "Trainmaster Wilkey!"

The sound of quick footsteps reached Morrow. A known voice sounded in his ears.

"Morrow!" cried Superintendent Gilman's voice. "For the love of Louie! Who have you there?"

Dave looked around. It was Old Whitey in very truth, now but a step or two away. And hurrying beside him, his face in the moonlight showing pale and worried, was Trainmaster Wilkey!

Morrow scrambled to his feet and hauled his prisoner erect. Clutching the man's coat collar, he confronted Gilman and the trainmaster.

"I have here," said Dave, "Officer Bremner; a famous expert on hot-boxes, dragging brake-beams and wooden derailers."

He looked at the trainmaster.

"Mr. Wilkey," he said, "your fowl is cooked—too well. It's burned to a frazzled cinder!"

"You lie!" cried Wilkey in a sudden hysterical passion.

Dave turned to Bremner; he raised his club over his captive's head.

"Say it again, officer," he commanded. "The name of the man who put you up to all this pretty work, I mean."

The officer said it.

IT WAS some time during the next afternoon that Superintendent Gilman and Dave Morrow for the third time were alone in the superintendent's office at Bellemore. They had arrived back in Bellemore very early that morning. Gilman sat tapping the edge of a sheet of paper on his desk.

"Trainmaster Wilkey's resignation," he said, and laid the paper aside.

He smiled across at Morrow in rare good humor.

"Davy, but he was the surprized boy when I instructed him to come along with me on Number Five last night. Uneasy, too; very much so. That made me all the keener. I had him keep right with me the whole time.

"We rode all the way in the vestibule of the last coach. Nobody but the conductor knew we were there. I had a hunch something might turn up; and if it did I wanted Wilkey to see me see it."

Gilman's smile broadened.

"It did and he did."

"It worked out every nicely," agreed Morrow casually.

But he was regarding Gilman with great, if silent, approval.

"You see," went on the superintendent, "I took your advice; decided I'd show some kick, some pep. But it was you that turned the big trick."

"A mere nothing," murmured Dave pleasantly.

"Whoosh!" exclaimed Gilman.

He got to his feet suddenly and leaned across the desk.

"Davy," he cried, "I wish you'd swallow that blessed pride of yours, or whatever it is, and stay here with me! I want you to stay where I can have your advice and help. I've got to have you!"

His eyes were very earnest, pleading.

"We old fellows must stick together, you know."

The man addressed did not answer for a moment. But all at once his fine gray eyes glowed warmly; that last sentence had finished the business. Gilman knew the day was won.

"Aye!" said Dave.

Wulfhere

A Five-Part Story
(Conclusion.)

By A. B. Higginson

CHAPTER XXXII

OF THE QUARREL BETWEEN THE BEAR BRETHREN AND HOW WO CAME OF IT

THAT night came Wulfhere to his brother's tent; he found him in a surly mood.

"Eanhere, my brother, let there be no cause of strife between us," he urged. "Did we not mingle blood? Did we not swear to be true each to the other? I pray thee, Eanhere, by the love we have borne each other that thou let no strife come in between us."

"I have been true to my vow of brotherhood; it is thou who hast been false," his friend muttered.

"Listen, Eanhere, wisely or wickedly I promised to deliver the maiden to Peada. It was my sole reason for coming hither. We have the maiden and Peada wants her. It is unfortunate that thou, my brother, hast learned to love her. Thou canst not hold me to blame for that. Must all our plans be changed and my vow broken for the sake of one who, though she may be fair, yet proved herself a traitress——"

"Hold!" shouted Eanhere, "I will not have thee call her by that name!"

"I would not have thee wed with such as she," Wulfhere continued, "and I tell thee plainly, brother, 'tis half for that reason I would take her to Peada who is more worthy of her."

Eanhere rose from his seat and came up close to his friend. His jaw was set and his lip quivered as he fixed his eyes on Wulfhere's eyes and demanded—

"Tell me now, was there no other reason?"

The question came so suddenly that Wulfhere who was not a friend to lying could not at first frame a reply. He hesitated, and his face flushed crimson like the face of a child caught in a lie. Could it be possible that Eanhere knew his real reason? There was but one real reason and that was not that he wished to keep Elgiva from his brother; nor was it that he could not break his vow. Had he not broken it already, for was it not Elflaeda he had come to fetch and not Elgiva?

Yes, Eanhere had caught him in a lie—an acted lie—and his conscience caused his heart to thump its protest in his throat. But subtle reason whispered in his ear—

"She must be saved, Elflaeda must be saved. She trusts in thee to shield her, therefore keep up the lie."

But how much did Eanhere know already? How could he know? Had they not been alone there in the wood? Wulfhere wondered if his guilt was written in his face, so closely did Eanhere watch him.

"Thy face is flushed. Why dost thou hesitate? Thou lookest like a perjured man. I wait thy answer."

In clear, stern tones Eanhere addressed him, his fierce eyes fixed on Wulfhere's face the while.

With an effort the regent pulled himself together and replied in a tone as of grieved anger.

"If I am flushed it is a flush of wrath and not of shame, or else it is a flush of shame for thee who swore eternal brotherhood and now forswear thyself by charging me with perjury. What meanest thou by that question? How dost thou dare to charge me with a lie? By Woden, I will have an answer first before I answer thee!" And he made pretence of great wrath to hide his shame.

Eanhere laughed a sneering, mocking laugh.

"I asked a plain and simple question—what other reason didst thou have? I will explain it by another. Hast told me, who was once thy friend, all of this tale, or hast thou hidden something from me for thine own reasons? Here is another question—was it Elgiva that Peada sought, or was it another?"

Wulfhere felt the net was closing in upon him, yet for Elflaeda's sake he must keep up the lie.

"Is she not Osric's daughter?" he asked.

"Aye, Osric's daughter."

"Knowest thou of any other that Osric had?"

"I am told he had but one."

"Was it not Osric's daughter that Peada demanded? Was it not she we came to take?"

"Aye, it was."

"Then what in Thunar is thy question for? Thou speakest like an empty-headed fool!" Wulfhere snapped out.

"Hearken thou, Wulfhere!" and Eanhere's face grew hard. "How was the maiden named whom Peada sought?"

"How was she named? Can I remember every maiden's name in England? One thing I do remember—she was Osric's daughter."

"Nay, but her name was Elflaeda, not Elgiva!"

Wulfhere started. It seemed clear his friend knew more than it was good he should know.

"She may have two names or a score, I care not," he replied.

"Hearken again! The report that carried to Peada's ears said she was dark, not fair."

"Report, report! Dost speak to me of such a common thing? Hast lived so long and hast not learned report to be the greatest liar after Loki?" Wulfhere cried in scorn.

Eanhere gazed fixedly once more upon his friend. He was puzzled. All his suspicions he had based on those few words of Elgiva uttered that very night. Wulfhere had never lied to him before; how could he charge him with a lie now on such meager evidence?

"Stand forth now like a man and deny that thou hast acted a lie before me, and swear it on thy sword," he ordered.

But Wulfhere could not go so far.

"Ask me as a friend and I will answer thee," he said, "but not from any man in England will I take such an insulting order. Go thy way. The day will come when thou wilt rue the hour thou didst forswear thy friend."

He turned on his heel and walked out of the tent. Eanhere tramped up and down before his couch in an agony of suspense. Was he doing his friend wrong to doubt his word? Why could his brother not deny it all? It was pride no doubt that caused him to refuse, but why should he let pride stand between him and an understanding with his friend? Yet where there is much smoke there must be fire, and back of every shadow there is substance. There must be something lying hid that he knew not of.

"Perhaps Oslac can tell me," he said.

HE DREW his cloak about his shoulders for the night was cool, and went to Oslac's tent. He found him about to lie down for the night, but he came to welcome Eanhere as he entered and placed a seat for him.

"What is it, lord; what can I do for thee?" Oslac asked.

"Tell me, Oslac," he said, "what was the damsel's name whose hand Peada sought in marriage?"

"Elflaeda was her name," he answered.

"Then she had two names."

"Nay, only one."

"But was she not Osric's daughter?"

"Aye."

"But Osric's daughter's name is Elgiva."

"True, lord, but Elflaeda was another daughter."

"I thought that Osric had but one."

"Elflaeda he adopted; she was his foster-daughter."

"Ah, is it so? And is she fair with golden hair and eyes blue like the sea?"

"Her hair was dark as night, lord, and she the most beautiful maid in all England; alas, for her sad fate."

"Is she then not alive?"

"She is dead, lord," he said, and told Eanhere how he was led a prisoner to the regent and found him standing by the body of Elflaeda. "A Hwiccan soldier," he said, "smote her down. I stopped at his command to see who she might be. The face was all disfigured from the blow, but the hair and robe were Elflaeda's, as also were the necklet over her fair shoulders and the ring upon her hand. Wulfhere commanded that a grave be dug. They laid her body in the grave and covered it up, and so the fairest flower in all Northumbria lies buried."

"I thank thee, Oslac; now will I disturb thee no longer. Farewell." And he slipped out of the tent, leaving Oslac staring after him.

Ha! So Wulfhere had lied to him after all. The maiden whom Peada wanted was dead. Wulfhere knew it, and yet demanded that Elgiva be sent, yea, and had lied about it to his own brother. He brushed against a man at the door of his tent as he entered.

"Out of the way," he snarled.

"Lord Eanhere, I would speak with thee," the man said.

"I have no leisure to speak with thee tonight," Eanhere muttered as he pushed past.

The man followed at his heels.

"Lord, I have somewhat to tell thee that thou shouldst hear," he urged.

"Come in then and tell it quickly."

The man entered and stood before the couch on which Eanhere had thrown himself. He had a bandage tied about his forehead, and a great bruise showed black over his eye. Moreover, his nose was cut and the bone of it crushed flat. Traces of blood still lingered about the wound.

"Hast thou been drinking, friend, or has some steed kicked thee in the face? Thy visage is sadly marred. Come now, out with thy tale."

"Lord, it concerns the Lord Wulfhere and Osric's daughter whom they say is dead, but who is not."

"Is not, knave! She was slain by a Hwiccan and at this moment lies buried in the forest as Oslac has just told me."

"Nay, thou art misinformed, lord. 'Tis all a plot of Wulfhere's to deceive thee."

"Beware, thou rascal, what thou sayest! Come, tell thy tale, and wo to thee if thou tellest me lies."

The ruffian, his ugly face contracted with passion, told his story. He told how he had followed Elflaeda and her maid flying into the forest, how he smote the maid to kill her that he might possess the mistress, and how Wulfhere came suddenly upon him and drove his fist into his face, leaving him disfigured for life.

"I warned him that I would be avenged," he said, "and I went into the woods out of his sight, then crept back softly behind the rock beside which he and Elflaeda were talking. He stood with his arm about her, and ever and anon he kissed her and she him. Much of what they said I could not catch for they talked softly, but I heard him say he had come to fetch her for Peada. Then she wept and called him brother and said she loved him only and would have none of Peada.

"'Save me,' she cried, 'save me, Wulfhere.'

"They put their arms about each other and I heard them speak of Elgiva, Osric's daughter. All that they said I could not hear, but I heard enough to know that Osric's daughter was to go to Peada instead of Elflaeda. She took her cloak and fastened it about the body of her dead maid. She put her ring on the dead maid's finger also, and her necklet about the maid's neck, and her armlets she fastened on the maid also; then promising him she would come to him when Elgiva was wed, she kissed him very tenderly and fled into the woods.

"I tried to follow, but from pain of my wound and loss of blood I could not, and ever since I have been waiting around out of his sight and reach for some chance to avenge myself upon him. This is my tale, lord."

He paused and waited for Eanhere's answer.

The Bear arose and heaved his ax above the soldier's head, but the latter blanched not. For all he smote a woman he was no coward.

"Swear by the gods thou dost worship that this is true," ordered Eanhere, still holding the ax above him.

"By all the gods I swear it!" the man responded.

Eanhere strode about the tent, a tempest raging in his soul.

"Go, leave me," he said, "and come in half an hour."

The man slunk out into the night.

"False, perjured brother!" these were his thoughts. "Bright Baldur fallen from heaven! A month ago and death would have been the portion of any one who told me such a tale. False to his blood-vow, false to his trusting brother, false to the wife that loves him, false to his own better nature! He would sacrifice all to enjoy a harlot! Pah, he is turned a toad and a serpent. Why should I spare him?"

Before the half-hour was up the soldier returned. For a few moments they talked softly together; then Eanhere put a piece of gold into the man's hand and bade him go.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE FEARFUL LEAP OF THE BRETHREN

WULFHERE chose forty men on the morrow and at their head marched south to Siccandun where Peada was. In the midst of the band, on horses, rode Elgiva and Goneril her nurse, both thickly veiled, and by their side walked Eanhere grim and silent. He had not been bidden to accompany the troop, but no man dared forbid him. For ten days they marched, pausing here and there to eat and rest and sleep. Eanhere ministered to the women and Wulhere came not near them.

About noon of the eleventh day they came in sight of Siccandun. It was set high on a great rock that overlooked the lake. On three sides the walls stretched out, but the precipice full seventy feet above the water was wall enough on the west. I need not further describe the town, lords, for ye know it well. Word was sent forward that Wulfhere was come on a mission of peace and would see the king. The drawbridge was lowered and the troop passed in. Eanhere waited at the gate till all had entered. A man muffled in a great cloak came up panting.

"Let this man pass," Eanhere said to the warder, and the man entered. Eanhere took his place again at the side of the women.

In the center of a square in the midst of the city—a square which bordered on the lake—Peada the king stood inspecting a regiment of swordsmen. Wulfhere halted his company about four hundred yards from the king, and motioning to Eanhere the two led the women forward.

"Greeting, King!" Wulfhere cried.

"Greeting to thee, Regent of Hwicce!" replied Peada. "Glad am I to see thee. What news from Northumbria?"

"Penda thy father is everywhere victorious, and is now investing Deorham and Bebbemburg. It has pleased the gods to grant a small measure of success to us of Hwicce, for Osric of Deira has fallen before our arms and we are now able to gratify a certain desire of thy heart. We have brought thee his daughter."

"Ha! Is it so, Wulfhere, my friend? I will reward thee for this." And he came forward strutting like a turkey-cock, and kneeled before the maid instead of the mistress.

"Lady, let thy humble servant assist thee to dismount," he said, as he stretched out his hands.

"This is the Lady Elgiva, King, on the black steed," said Wulfhere, unable to restrain a smile as Peada rose from his knee considerably chagrined to find that he who was always so careful of his dignity had bent his knee to a serving-maid.

He went up to Elgiva and gave her his hand to help her dismount.

"Pray draw thy veil, lady, for I would look upon that beauty of which I have heard and dreamed so much."

She drew her veil aside and he looked long upon her. All could see there was a look of disappointment in his eyes. Beautiful she was indeed but hardly up to his expectations.

"Thou art very lovely, maiden," he said, "but thou art not the lady of my dreams, for she had raven hair. Is there no mistake here?" he asked turning to Wulfhere.

"None, my Lord King," he answered. "Ask the lady. She is indeed Osric's daughter—his only child."

"Is this so lady?" Peada asked.

"It is so king, I am Elgiva, Osric's only daughter," she replied.

"Elgiva! Methought thy name was Elflaeda; but never mind, you Northerners have names innumerable. Come, Osric's daughter, my captain will lead thee to my house."

He called his captain, and with a look of misery and reproach at Wulfhere, Elgiva followed to Peada's home.

"Come, Sir Regent," Peada demanded

when she had gone, "explain to me how it is that this lady though beautiful is not as lovely as I was led to believe."

"Lord King," he answered, "if men will lead thee to believe things that are not true, what is there then to explain?"

"Quite true, thou art not to blame for others' lies; but they told me that her name was Elflaeda, and that her hair was dark as night."

"Lies again, King, for as thou seest she is fair; and as for her name it may be Elflaeda, but I know it is Elgiva; also she is Osric's daughter."

At this point a man with a disfigured face, and a cloak about him pushed forward.

"King Peada, it is a lie!" he shouted. "The regent would deceive thee! Protect me and I will explain all." And he moved to the side of the king, farthest from Wulfhere.

Every eye turned upon the speaker, and the regent fingered his sword.

"Who art thou, fellow?" demanded the king.

"I am one who knows that this lady brought to thee is not Elflaeda whose hand thou hast demanded," cried the man. Then pointing to Wulfhere, "See, his hand is on his sword; give me thy protection, King, and I will reveal all!"

The king regarded him a moment.

"Doubtless thou art a knave, but thou art a bold one," he said. "Come, tell thy tale! No man dare touch thee till I give permission."

"King, I protest!" cried Wulfhere. "This man is a coward and a rascal. I saw him smite a woman in the face and for it I smashed his features as thou seest them, and now he would have revenge. Hearken not to him, but have him whipped as he deserves."

"Nay, but I would hear what he has to tell first; after that, perhaps—now speak, fellow!" Peada ordered.

The man began to tell his tale, and when he had ended he leered at Wulfhere and repeated.

"So this is Osric's daughter indeed. Lord King, and not Elflaeda whom thou lovest."

Hardly had he uttered the last word when with a bound Wulfhere was on him. Great Sword flashed in the very face of the king, and the head of the traitor fell against Peada's knee.

"Seize him! Slay him who would kill one under my protection," the king cried. "Down with the dog!"

There was a rush toward Wulfhere.

"To me, my brother!" he shouted, but Eanhere twenty paces off leaned on his ax and watched.

DOWN went the first assailant cloven to the teeth. Down went another over him. Another and another bit the dust, and all the while Peada cried out——

"Slay the dog!"

And now four men assailed Wulfhere together. Alas, what man can stand against four practised warriors at once? He pierced one through his shield, but before he could withdraw his sword the blade of the next man hit him on the temple. Half-stunned he dropped his weapon and fell upon one knee, casting as he did so a look of infinite reproach at his friend who still stood idly looking on. His end was come at last. A darkness crept before his eyes. He drew his shield before his face and staggered as a blow crashed on it, then fell prone on the ground and knew no more.

Meanwhile Eanhere was suffering the agony of the damned. Every blow that threatened his friend's life caused him to grip the handle of Blood Ax till the blood oozed from his fingers. His love urged him to go to his brother's aid, but his hate still held him back. But when he saw Wulfhere's sword drop from his hand and the look that Wulfhere gave him as he fell, he forgot the wrongs that had been done him and with a yell of fury he hurled himself against the Mercians.

So sudden and unexpected was the charge, that two men of the four were down before they could strike a blow and the other two were soon finished. That yell roused Wulfhere from his stupor. He raised his head and saw his friend standing over him and a dozen Mercians charging down upon them. He reached for Great Sword, rose to his feet, and took his stand beside Eanhere.

"At them!" shrieked the king. "Cut them down!"

Slowly the two gave way, leaving a trail of dead behind them as they went. The precipice was near; the lake was seventy feet below. They were strong swimmers both, but there were rocks beneath; the question was—could they leap clear of them? There was a chance for life in the leap; they could but die if they fought on much longer. Wulfhere thought of

Elflaeda; he was not ready to die yet. Eanhere thought of Elgiva; mayhap she would need his protection still.

"The lake is close behind," panted Eanhere. "Leap, brother—leap!"

"Leap thou the first, Eanhere," his friend ordered.

"Nay, quick! Leap thou and I will follow."

Wulfhere with a fierce thrust cut down the nearest Mercian, then turned and ran for the lake. Eanhere too just a moment later followed. With a mighty spring Wulfhere sailed like a swallow through the air, clearing a huge rock far below at the water's edge, and cleaving the water like a knife. He saw the form of Eanhere sink beside him as he rose to the surface and swam to the shadow of the rock. There in that shadow, hidden from the eyes of those above, he waited for his brother to appear. A minute went—two minutes—three.

He dived in the direction Eanhere fell and found him lying at the bottom of the lake weighed down by his ponderous ax that still clung to his wrist, and by his heavy armor. He seized the unconscious form of his friend and dragged him to the surface; then taking him over to the rock he laid him down upon the sand. He found a deep gash in Eanhere's head—he must have hit the rock in his descent. No doubt it had stunned him.

Long he worked with his friend till at last life returned. First he felt a faint heartbeat, then Eanhere's eyelids began to twitch, and soon he raised his head and opened his eyes, then fell into a deep sleep. Wulfhere looked cautiously around the rock. He had heard many heavy thuds as of bodies falling from a height against the ground, but he had been too busy working with his friend to take much heed. Now he understood what had caused the sounds.

Before his eyes lay all that was left of his forty men. Their flesh mangled, their bones shattered, their brains and blood spattered over the stones, on every side of the rock they lay. He turned his eyes away as he sickened at the fearful sight.

The twilight began to gather about them, and then the night came on. The moon rose and by its light Wulfhere saw the form of his friend stretched out at his side, still fast asleep. He must wake him, for before morning they two must be far from Peada's town.

Gently he shook Eanhere till the sleeper sat up. He rubbed his eyes and stared about him, then the memory of it all came back to him and he scowled upon his brother.

Wulfhere looked on him sadly.

"My brother," he said, "I can not bear that thou shouldst be like this to me. I was wrong in hiding all from thee, but would have told thee all the tale if thou hadst given me a chance. Hearken now, and when thou hast heard condemn me if thou wilt."

Eanhere said nothing, and his brother told his story. Of the scheme that I, Edbert, had in view, and that he had promised to keep secret, he told Eanhere. Of the finding of Elflaeda in the wood and the discovery that she was his long-lost sister; of his faithful promise to her that he would save her and let no man know that she still lived till a convenient time arrived; of her promise to come to him again when Elgiva was wed and times were quieter; he told his brother all. Eanhere stretched out his hand to him.

"Forgive me, brother," he said. "Surely my love has blinded me and taken away my reason. I do not blame thee for promising to save thy sister, especially as thou didst not approve of my love for Elgiva. I only am to blame, forgive me." And the strong man broke down and wept.

"Nay, but it was I who was in the wrong in keeping anything from thee, Eanhere," said his friend. "I swear to thee I will do all I can to destroy this Peada and take her from him whom I so cruelly delivered up. She shall be thine, yet, Eanhere, I swear it to thee, friend."

But Eanhere shook his head.

"I fear that that can never be," he said, "but now we must be going. I would return now to my children for a season, for it is long since the bears have seen me."

"Do so, my brother," Wulfhere answered, "and when thou art ready come again to me; then wo to Peada!"

They climbed the steep cliff and parted, Eanhere going west, but Wulfhere north.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE MIGHTY STRUGGLE AT WINWEDFIELD

NOW far up in the north Penda with his army ravaged Bernicia. Eanfrid, the Bernician King, unable to cope with Penda and Cadwallo, determined that he would

ask terms. Penda the heathen he feared greatly, but Cadwallo he said was a Christian and would surely listen to his entreaties. With but twelve men he journeyed to Cadwallo's camp. To the Briton's everlasting shame he took Eanfrid and slew him and his twelve. This happened but one month before the battle of Heavenfield when Cadwallo was slain, Oswy, Eanfrid's brother, took his place as King of Bernicia, but there was little at first that he could do.

Penda laid siege to the royal city of Bebbenburg whither Oswy had fled. Not being able to enter it by force, for its walls were very strong, he tried to burn it; and having destroyed all the villages in the neighborhood of the city he brought great quantities of planks, beams, wattles and thatch wherewith to encompass the place to a great height on the land side, and when the wind set upon it he fired the mass, designing to burn the town.

At that time the most reverend Bishop Aidan resided on the Island of Farne, two miles from the city. When he saw the flames and the smoke carried by the boisterous wind above the city walls he lifted up his eyes and hands to Heaven and cried,

"Behold, Lord, how great mischief Penda does!"

Scarcely were his words uttered when the wind turning from the city drove back the fire upon those who kindled it so that many were burned and all the rest so frightened that they forbore any further attempts against the town. This, lords, is the story of that miracle as it came to me, and I can vouch for its truth, for I was there and saw the wind and the fire turn away from the city. Aidan was indeed a holy man of God.

Wulfhere and Oswald traveled north, gaining strength as they went, till they came upon Penda at Mesafeld. Against Wulfhere's counsel Oswald determined to fight us. He was a Christian, he said, and his God would fight for him; but the fear of Penda was so strong in the minds of the Northumbrians that early in the fight they wavered, and at last scattered and fled. Oswald was killed, and Wulfhere seeing all was lost sounded a retreat and drew his men away.

I have not told you, lords, much of my life during those days, for it was not of myself that I wished to speak in the tale that I have been telling, but let me mention only a few things. Penda began to be almost a madman. He could not sleep at night for fear of the awful dreams he had. Moreover the spirit of my sister whom he had murdered, and the spirits of my people, now haunted him almost nightly. At last he dreamed a dream in which he saw me standing over him with a spear in my hand.

From that time on he kept me under watch, and allowed me to be seldom near him. He openly charged me with wishing his death, and I have reason to believe he meant shortly to take my life. At Mesafeld I was not permitted to go into the battle. My state became intolerable to me, and when I saw the banner of Wulfhere I made up my mind to fly to him. I slipped away from my guards as the Northumbrians and Hwiccans began to retreat, and in due time reached my son who welcomed me most heartily.

"There is no place any more for me in Penda's camp," I said, "so I have come to thee."

"Thou art welcome, my father—more than welcome," he said as he clasped my hand.

I sent a message by a prisoner that Wulfhere took. It ran thus:

Tell Penda he has done an ill deed in driving me, Edbert, to his enemies. Tell him further to see he seeks me not, for in the day we meet again—he dies.

We made our way north to join with Oswy, for it was said he had a large force there. We found him at Hegulstad, then marched south with him to come up if we could with Penda. It seemed to Wulfhere folly thus to put our heads in the lion's mouth, but Oswy when he had learned my story put great faith in my counsel and ordered the march south.

"Penda is turning madman," I told him. "He has been long in Northumbria, and his men wish to go home. They fear him greatly for he has been terribly cruel with them, but they are ready at the first opportunity to desert. It is strange that before now some one has not had the courage to murder him. His days are numbered, King," I said. "My spirit tells me he has not long to live. He knows it also for nightly in dreams he is reminded of it. Strike now, I say, for it is the time."

"Edbert, thy counsel seems the height of folly," Oswy replied, "yet the more I think of it the more I like it. We have a strong force now at our back. If we fight not now how can we keep them together?

Better to fight and trust in God to help, than to rot here."

Wulfhere only shook his head and answered nothing.

We came up with King Penda by the river Winwed, near to Leeds. Our captains were struck with dismay when they saw the seeming strength of his lines, and insisted that the King first treat with him. Oswy, who was very brave, would have attacked him suddenly and trusted to the fortune of the day, but his commanders were against it. Accordingly he sent heralds who offered Penda an enormous tribute to depart from Northumbria, but Penda, having resolved to exterminate Oswy's people, rejected the offer. Upon this Oswy cried—

"If this heathen refuses to accept our gifts, let us offer them to Him that will—even to God."

He made a vow to dedicate his daughter to the Lord, and promised much land to God's church; then calling me to him, with Wulfhere and Oslac and his son Alfred, he asked my counsel as to how we should attack. Knowing the disposition of Penda's lines, his manner of attack, his commanders and the number of his regiments, I was able to give Oswy advice without which I can now say without boasting he could not have the victory.

"Penda has thirty legions," I said, "and thirty commanders beside Immin and Eafa. Ethelwald, King Oswald's son, is with him with three thousand men, but he will desert during the battle. Penda loses not a moment to attack with a sudden reckless fury. Dig trenches then on front and sides of our position, and lay branches upon them, and reeds and grass upon the branches. Keep well behind the trenches. Let Penda do the attacking. Charge his wild Mercians and ye are lost. Do as I say and ye will win the battle. My spirit tells me that in this fight Penda will die."

The rest of that day and far into the night the men were busy digging, and the trenches were made wide and deep. Three lines of trenches were thus dug along the sides of our position. We bridged them here and there with logs piled close together to allow our men to cross. A regiment was drawn up before them to prevent the enemy seeing what was going on. At midnight the work was done, and companies of archers and swordsmen took their stand in long lines just behind the first ditch, others again stood behind the second, and the main body of our army behind the third.

ON THE morrow the attack began. Ten legions of Mercians thundered up the hill upon our position. It was a fearsome charge. Never before had I seen it from the front, and I can well understand from that sight how it was Penda was ever victorious.

"Shoot not an arrow," the king commanded. "The trench will dispose of this first charge."

With shouts and roars the Mercians thundered on. Suddenly the front rank disappeared, then the second and the third. Those in the rear knew not what was happening in front and bore their comrades forward. Not five hundred men of the five thousand reached our ranks, and these were easily disposed of by our first line of swordsmen. The first trench was well nigh filled with kicking, quivering flesh.

Penda saw that something was amiss, but approaching nearer and finding the trench was full, he ordered a single regiment forward to see if there were any more pitfalls. They charged in the same impetuous way as the first five had done and found a grave in the second trench, our front rank in the meantime having retired behind the second ditch. Penda then sent two regiments to take us in the flanks. Half of them met the same fate as their fellows. Never had he seen this way of fighting. He had lost seven thousand men and we not two hundred.

He led his men around to take us in the rear where there was no trench, hoping thus to drive us into our own trap. We sent a regiment to hold them in check till we had crossed over our inmost trench and dragged the bridges with us. When they had cut down that regiment almost to a man and charged upon us they fell once more into the pit by thousands. Always we kept those trenches between us and the foe, and by the time they were filled with dead our army was more numerous than theirs.

"See! There goes Ethelwald with his three thousand," I said, and pointed him out to Oswy, retiring from the fray to the crest of a hill to watch the conflict. "Penda's forces see him. Lo, they waver; now

is thy time, King, charge with all thy power!" I shouted.

He sounded the charge, and Northumbrians and Hwiccans hurled themselves upon the enemy. Some of them made a noble fight but most of them turned and fled. All through the battle Oswy kept me close at his side.

"See, the Mercians break! They fly!" he cried, clapping his hands.

"Those are men, King, who never fled before. They fly not because of fear. Did I not tell thee they are sick unto death of all this warfare and only wait their chance to desert and go back to their homes? See, yonder is Penda!"

"Ah, what a giant he is," exclaimed Oswy, "he will fight to the very death."

I took my javelin, and leaving the king's side I made for the spot where Penda at the head of a little group among whom were Immin and Eafa, made his last stand. I had to climb upon a wall of dead to come near to him.

"Penda, thine hour is come!" I cried aloud.

He heard my voice and as he looked at me his face turned pale, for well he knew I spoke the truth. Then a great fury seized him.

"Edbert, thou traitor!" he roared. "Would to Woden I had listened to Icil long since and crushed thee under my heel! Fiend, take that to thy sister!"

He seized a spear from a soldier near him and hurled it at me. I leaped aside and it transfixed three Northumbrians behind me, so terrible was the force with which he hurled it. I poised my javelin in my hand a moment, taking aim just below his throat where the steel collar joins the mail shirt, and I mocked him as I prepared to cast.

"A message from Edbert, King!" I shouted, and let fly the weapon.

He heard my words but looked too late to avoid the spear. True to its aim it pierced his throat and stood out half a foot behind his neck. He glared at me, staggered but could not speak, and tugged at the spear while the blood poured out in jets and torrents down his breast.

"That for Cyneswithe, King!" I screamed. "That for the family of Edbert whom thou hast murdered! That for the evils thou has brought on me and mine! That for the East Anglian folk whom thou hast butchered! Fiend and demon, thou goest to the land where there is no sleep, but where never-ending torments will seize thy vitals! Pass on, murderer, pass on into the dark!"

Thus I gloated over him and mocked him.

He shook his great fist at me; his eye grew glassy; and he fell with a crash among the slain. Penda the Strong, the Terrible, the Glorious—was dead.

Thus it came to pass, lords, as my old nurse had foretold so many years before, and as my sister Cyneswithe also had prophesied, that Penda died—died by my spear.

The might of Mercia was broken. Some thirty captains fell, and over twenty thousand Mercians and their allies lay dead upon the field, or in the trenches, or in the river. Almost all Penda's allies were slain, among them Ethelhere, brother of Anna of the East Angles, who had escaped the slaughter of his people years before because Penda knew not of him then for he was away in a foreign land. Worthy was he to die who would assist the murderer of his two brothers in his wars. The earth about was watered with Mercian blood, and sprinkled with Mercian brains. Northumbria was delivered. The wolf and the lion were no more.

Ah, what rejoicing there was then in the land. Oswy was proclaimed the savior of his country, and crowned king of united Northumbria. Deirans and Bernicians, so often at strife one with the other, now vied with each other to do him honor, and for the first time in many years the land had peace.

CHAPTER XXXV

HOW WULFHERE QUARRELS WITH IMOGEN, HIS WIFE

NOW on the day I came to Wulfhere he told me all that had taken place after he left me to go up against Osric of Deira. He told me too of Osric's daughter and of the finding of Elflaeda. I longed to tell him of his birth and give him the message of his dead mother. Our plans had fallen out badly. I had schemed to put him on the throne of Penda and Elflaeda was to have been the price of the Mercian's favor, but he could not give his own sister to Peada, and because of her there was now bitter strife between these two men.

I too was disgraced in the eyes of Mercia, and no longer would my counsels prevail in the land. Our schemes had crumbled like a house of sand, and all because of Elfiaeda.

So now we must begin afresh for I was still determined that Wulfhere should come to his own. There was no more to be done in Northumbria. By one strong stroke Oswy had not only become master of that land, but now his shadow hung over the land of Mercia. Peada sent a herald to him to arrange a treaty of peace, but Oswy had the thick end of the stick and the only terms that he would promise Peada were—the acknowledgment of his kingship over the South Angles as tributary sovereign. All the rest of Mercia was to be joined to Northumbria and governed by Northumbrian thanes appointed by Oswy himself.

Humiliating in the extreme was the treaty, but what else could Peada do but accept the terms. Penda had left him but few regiments, and most of his men had grown to hate him. Since Oswy had taken the goose to pick, Peada must needs be content with the crow. These terms had been arranged after Wulfhere and I, with what were left of our army, had reached Hwicce, and very wroth I was to hear them. What Penda had taken a lifetime to build up this Oswy had pulled down in a day, and I—yes I, had been the principal cause, by my counsel to Oswy, of the downfall of Mercia.

The Northumbrian I could not blame. The Mercians had sought to take his land, why should he not try to take theirs in return when he could? I could have wept with rage at my own folly, for I had been the cause of this, and meager were the pickings I had left Wulfhere. What made things worse he was not ambitious.

Had he put himself heart and soul into the work of winning back old Mercia we could do it even yet, I was convinced, for with me to plan and him to carry out my plans we two—yes, we two—could do it still. But he was only half-hearted about it all, and I despaired of ever doing it. But I would try—I would try. That very night I would tell him the great secret and use my utmost power to wake up his ambition.

On Wodensday in September we had arrived in Hwicce. The whole town turned out to greet us, but the shouts of joy of the few were drowned by the cries of mourning of the many, for fathers and husbands and sons had been left on the Northumbrian plains, and the wild fowl were even now picking their bones. It was a sad homecoming. We had gone out in our thousands, a few hundreds only returned. The whole land was steeped in mourning and a bitter wail went up to heaven.

At such times, lords, warlike acts are little thought of, and Wulfhere and his captains walked through the streets of Worcester not like victorious conquerors but like whipped dogs, ashamed to show their heads.

Cold was the reception we received from King Eanfrith and the lords about him. Even Brian greeted us coldly. At first Wulfhere could not understand it, and he felt much hurt and disappointed. Had he not risked his life for Hwicce? Had he not done great deeds to bring renown upon his people? It required few words from me to show him the reason for all the coldness.

"Didst thou not go out pledged to fight against Northumbria and to assist Cadwallo and Penda?" I asked. "Instead thou hast helped Northumbria against its enemies, and Penda and the Briton thou hast slain."

He smote his thigh with his great fist.

"Gods, it is true," he cried, "and when they have plucked up courage they will hang me for a traitor!"

The coldness grew as the rumors spread that Oswy, forgetting Wulfhere's services, or remembering the former enmity of the Hwiccans, was reaching out in their direction and would soon draw them into his dominions. Very like there was no truth in the reports, yet the reports continued to spread and many believed them. Strange men followed Wulfhere through the streets at night at a safe distance, and one hurled a spear at him as he entered his door. The place that had been cold was now getting hot for him.

In the meantime Imogen, who had greeted him kindly enough at first, showed clearly she had something rankling in her bosom. Me she disliked as I have said before, and now she took no pains to hide her feelings toward me.

One night Wulfhere had occasion to rebuke her for an act of rudeness to me.

"Remember," he said sternly, "that he is my father, and that thou art my wife,"

meaning that as his wife he had the right to punish her.

She caught his meaning quickly enough, and turned upon him in great indignation.

"And what has thy father done for thee to win thy love?" she cried. "If thou art hated here in Hwicce and men go about to kill thee, he is the cause of it." And she pointed her finger at me.

"Hush, woman, thou hast said enough!"

"Nay, I have not said enough," she continued. "It was he who led thee to go into Northumbria. 'Twas he who for the sake of a girl persuaded thee to fight the Deirans and slay many innocent people, making orphans and widows to mourn all the rest of their days. And when thou didst take the wench and found her to be fair thou didst call her sister and delivered up another to Peada. And now Peada is our enemy and will work us harm, and all because of the counsel of this old fool."

"Peace, thou jade!" Wulfhere growled.

But naught could stop her tongue; she must have her say out.

"For this man whom thou callest father thou hast slain half the soldiers of Hwicce, and drawn a heavy cloud of sorrow over the land, and because of him men hiss 'traitor' at thee in the street."

He sprang to his feet.

"Begone, woman with the tongue of a serpent! Begone before I slay thee! One word more and I will put thee away and call thee no more 'wife.' Get thee gone now and quickly; I have suffered thee too long already." And he pushed her roughly to the door.

"Low-born upstart!" she flung at him. "I raised thee up and I will pull thee down again."

He thrust her out and banged the door behind her.

"Ah, what a woman!" he said as he returned to his seat. "Evil was that day when I took her to wife."

"Speak no more of her," I said. "I have something else to speak to thee of, my son."

"Speak on," he said, and sat back in his chair with his head on his hands as one deep in thought.

For a while there was silence. Close beside us there was a door kept always locked for there was no use made of it. I thought I heard a rustle close by the door.

"Are we alone, my son?" I asked. "I thought I heard a movement outside the door."

"'Tis but the wind, it blows from the north tonight," he answered.

I put my ear close to the door to make sure, but heard no sound save only the wind whistling through the wall-chinks.

"HEARKEN, Wulfhere," I began. "Thou art no son of mine, though son I have called thee all thy life."

He sat forward with a swift motion and bent on me a look that seemed to say—

"Surely thou hast lost thy senses."

I repeated what I had said.

"Is it indeed so, my father? How can it be? Tell me more," he said quietly.

"Thou art the son of Penda who is dead," I went on, and I told him all the story of his birth and rearing, and of his father's suspicions that had made my life a misery to me for so long. And when I told him of his mother and her last message his whole frame shook with weeping.

"Ah, I remember, Edbert, my father—for always thou wilt be 'father' to me—I remember how my mother used to take me in her arms when I was but a child, and embrace and kiss me, and many times when no one else was there I saw tears in her eyes and heard her sob. I wondered then, and often I wondered too why she whom I thought my mother scolded me and showed me but little love. Now I see all. Alas, my mother, cruel was thy lot! Had I but known before thy murderer would not long have outlived thee. To think that I am sprung from such a monster. Tell me, father, am I much like Penda, for if I am I will not live another day? The earth can not abide another such as he."

"My son," I said, "in form and strength thou art thy father over again, but thy heart is as unlike his as thy gentle mother's was."

"Thank God for that!" he answered. "Dost know, my father, that part of this tale I heard now many years ago?"

"Which part, my son?"

"That I am Penda's son."

"Impossible, Wulfhere; none knew it save thy mother and I, and Penda's mother."

"And yet when I came to Eanhere's hut in the Bear Mountains he told me he had dreamed that I would come, and that I was son to Penda."

"'Twas a strange dream but true, my

son. Now let me tell the rest of the tale."

"Elflaeda, what of her, my father?"

"It is of Elflaeda I would speak," I said. "She is my daughter but not thy sister, Wulfhere."

He leaped up, and a glad smile was on his face.

"Ah! That is news I have often wished to hear!" he cried. "Now she can be my wife."

"And what of Imogen?" I asked.

He frowned.

"I will put her away—the scold—as I have power to do. No woman on earth must stand between me and my love."

"Careful—careful, Wulfhere," I cautioned. "Speak softly lest thy words be heard. Even walls have ears they say."

"I care not who hears!" he shouted, and then in a soft voice he went on. "Yet thou are right, my father, we must hide this for a while. Thou must still be my father and Elflaeda my sister. None must know this secret for a time—least of all Imogen."

"That is right, my son," I said. "Bury it deep in thy bosom, for if it be made known now we will soon be dead men. And now let me speak of another matter."

I told him of the shameful state of vassalage to which Mercia had been brought; how Peada was hated and Merwal utterly despised as a depraved weakling; how that Immin and Eafa and other chief Mercian thanes were grinding their teeth with fury at the present state of things; and how, if they but knew that another son of Penda lived they would acclaim him king.

"Ethelred, Penda's youngest son, is but a child," I said, "but thou art as Penda's self. Rouse thee, Wulfhere," I said as I saw that he seemed indifferent about the kingship of Mercia, "rouse thee, my son. It is thy bounden duty to take upon thee this task of building up again the fallen kingdom of thy father. Under my guidance thou wilt do it. A word from me and Eafa and Immin will come over to us and bring with them the greater part of Mercia. Come now, what sayest thou?"

He only sat there thinking deeply, then shook his head.

"Elflaeda will come soon," he said, "and I would enjoy her company for a season. I have had enough of wars and plottings and would have some rest."

"Dost thou refuse?" I asked.

"Aye, I refuse," he answered. "To my mind thy proposal is all folly."

I urged and pleaded with him; 'twas all in vain. Then I rose up from my chair, and baring my withered arm I pointed my finger at him.

"Base coward that thou art and shirker of thy duty," I shouted. "Low slave to sloth who would rather fondle a woman in thy arms for thy own sensual pleasure than take a good sword in thy hand for thy country's deliverance! Traitor to Mercia! Thy father was a man, while thou art but a slave! I thank the gods this day thou art no son of mine!"

All the force that was in me I put into my words, and my face worked in a furious passion. A dreadful scowl came over his countenance at first, and he felt for his sword, but soon his face cleared and he stretched out his hand to me saying:

"Be satisfied, my father, I will do as thou wishest."

I threw my arms about him and wept on his neck. Once more I heard that rustle at the door as we talked over our plans against Peada, and then we went to our several chambers to rest, and if we could, to sleep.

In the morning Wulfhere found his wife had flown. He inquired of the servants in the house; they said she had gone to her father's, and had taken her little son with her. He was content, for now he longed above everything to be rid of her, and cast about him to find how he could put her away and take Elflaeda without a scandal.

As for me, I sent a trusty messenger to Immin to tell him of Wulfhere, the son of Penda, who was ready to take up the fallen banner of Mercia and carry it once more to victory. In due time a reply came. Immin and Eafa were spreading the news secretly among the thanes of Mercia. Already half of them were pledged to support Wulfhere, and almost half the army could be counted on. The task of winning the rest must be a tedious one, but Immin had no doubt but that in six months our following would be strong enough to oust Peada from the throne.

What made the task still harder was the fact that we must contend not alone against Peada, but Oswy also must be taken into account. With the exception of Peada's regiments, the Mercian army had, most of

it, been disbanded or drafted into Oswy's service. To get hold of these men therefore meant much perilous and secret plotting, and all this took much time.

Wulfhere and I, with a chosen band of soldiers we could trust, withdrew from Worcester and took up our quarters in the town of Whichford near to the Bear Mountains. There we were free, as we thought, to carry on our plotting, unshadowed by Hwiccan spies. We little knew what the malice and jealousy of Imogen were capable of. Many times I saw cloaked figures slinking into the dark corners of the streets as we passed by, only to reappear again and follow us at a distance. At first I took small notice but soon became convinced that they meant mischief. We had not long to wait to find out to our bitter sorrow what they meant by prowling there.

CHAPTER XXXVI

ELFLAEDA COMES TO WHICHFORD

IMOGEN had been put away. Wulfhere had proven to the council that she had forsaken his bed and home, and that she was a scold who made life weary for him. His servants who loved him testified the same; nor did Imogen or her father, Brian, appear to enter any protest. The council were loth to grant him the divorce but could not well refuse as nothing had been proven against him. Moreover, the custody of his little son was his by right though now the child was with his mother. Wulfhere had had two other children but they had died.

The next night as we sat in my son's house in Whichford talking over these things, there came a feeble knock at the door. Ah, the joy, lords, that came into my old heart when, Wulfhere having swung it open, I saw Elflaeda standing there.

"Elflaeda, my daughter, my daughter!" I cried, and I clasped her in my arms and wept with her, and she also wept.

More beautiful was she than ever I dreamed a woman could be, and ah, she was as sweet and pure as she was beautiful. She told us as she reached us, and we trembled as she told us, for more than once her peril was very great. Once rude soldiers almost captured her; again she was lost in the forest, and when the night came on and she heard the howling of the wolves she climbed a tree and spent the night there; again, before she reached the village a great bear, brown and white, almost ran against her at a turn of the path, but she turned in time and fled, and, when she could run no more for very weariness she looked around and saw the bear still standing where he had met her, and only looking toward her.

Wulfhere went up to her and kissed her on the lips.

"I have something to tell thee, Elflaeda," he said. "Hearken! Edbert here is thy father but he is not mine. Thou art not my sister, Elflaeda."

She pushed him from her, and coming close to me she asked:

"What means he, father—is this so?"

"It is so, my daughter," I said, and I told her all.

Sadder and sadder grew her face as I went on.

"Then I have no longer any brother," she said when I had finished. "I have only thee, my father." And she threw her arms about me and clung to me.

"Thou canst not have me for a brother, Elflaeda," said Wulfhere, "but wilt thou not have me for a husband?"

"Imogen?" she murmured.

"Imogen has left me; she is no more my wife," he answered, and yet another tale had to be told.

"But wilt thou not put me away too, Wulfhere?" she asked. "For I shall grow very jealous too, and scold and scold."

"Nay, thou wilt not," he replied, "yet I will take the risk if thou wilt wed me, Elflaeda."

She put out her hand to him. He took it and put it to his lips, then clasped her in his arms and called her "wife."

Suddenly a spear whistled over my head and buried its point in the wall behind Wulfhere, missing him by a hand's breadth. For a moment I saw a leering face at the window overhead, then it was gone, and though we searched the streets on every side we could find no one.

Elflaeda clung to Wulfhere weeping.

"Send me away!" she sobbed. "Send me away! Alas! it is my lot to bring sorrow and death to all who love me!"

"Sorrow and death are welcome," he said, "so long as I have thee, my love." And he comforted her.

So Wulfhere and Elflaeda were wed by a Christian priest of the village, and they lived as man and wife. But dark clouds of trouble were gathering on the horizon of their happiness, and the sun would soon be obscured leaving in the place of its light only gloom and death.

A FORTNIGHT later a woman with a small child approached the gate of Siccandun as Peada at the head of his favorite regiment was issuing from it. She threw herself at his feet, crying:

"Justice! Justice!"

"What wantest thou, woman?" he asked gruffly.

"Justice, my Lord King!"

"Justice upon whom?" he asked. "Speak quickly! I have no time to waste on thee."

"On Wulfhere, Regent of Hwicce!" she cried.

"Ha! That will be hard to get. But what has he done to thee, and why should I help thee to get justice upon him?"

"Because I was his wife and he put me away for another, and——"

"What have I to do with his putting thee away, woman?" he growled.

"But Elflaeda," she cried, "she still lives, she whom he hid from the king; she is now his wife and lives with him in Whichford near the Mountain of the Bears."

"Is this true, woman?" he shouted. "Beware how thou dost lie to me!"

"It is true, King; I, who was his wife, I swear it!"

"Then the soldier whom he slew here told no lie?"

"No lie, King," she went on; "moreover, he plots against thee to take thy throne."

Peada laughed a great laugh.

"He plots against me, does he? The mouse plots to steal the lion's teeth. Let the mouse plot. Woman, I can not spare a regiment just now. Later I will go and take this maiden from him and avenge thee at the same time," and he made as though to continue his march.

"But, King, I have not told thee all!" she cried. "Wulfhere who was called the son of Edbert——"

"Aye, I have heard that story," he interrupted, "and as for Edbert let me but lay hands on the traitor and murderer of my father, and all his body will be as his arm is now. I'll boil him in a caldron and cast him to the birds."

"Wulfhere is not his son, King. I listened at his door and heard him tell Wulfhere the story of his birth, how he was the son of Penda and of Edbert's sister, Cyneswithe, who was Penda's wife. He is Penda's son, and shortly he will be here to lay claim to Penda's throne."

Now Peada stood astounded, and for a moment he could not speak, then he came up close to Imogen.

"Tell me now softly all thou knowest of this," he said, for he did not wish his men to hear more than they had heard—he knew well how much they hated him.

She told him all that she had heard me tell Wulfhere that night I heard a rustle at the door. Then he remembered there was a time when this very thing was half-suspected by his father, Penda, and that it was because of this Penda had destroyed my house, slaughtered my wife and son, and put me to such cruel torture. At the time he believed it to be but a wild tale; now he knew that it was true.

He walked back to his men.

"Take this woman and her brat and put them both to death," he ordered, "for she has just confessed to me her story is a lie. She would be avenged on the Regent of Hwicce for a wrong he did her, therefore she dares to come to me with a lie."

Now Imogen was in a sad case.

"Ah, spare me, King, and my child. It is no lie—it is the truth!" she wailed. "Spare us, spare us."

He turned with a laugh to his captains.

"I am minded of an act of Solomon, the Hebrew king," he said. "Behold, and see if there is not a wiser than Solomon here."

He strode forward and seized Imogen's son—a little blue-eyed boy of but three years—and tore him screaming from his mother's arms, while all the time the mother wailed for mercy.

"Cease blubbering, woman," he roared, "and hearken to what I say. Repeat thy lie and I will cut the brat in half before thy face; confess the truth and it may be I will spare him."

She did not hesitate, for she knew now that he did not wish his men to believe her tale.

"It is a lie indeed!" she cried. "I was wrath with Wulfhere because he put me away, and I wished thee to punish him,

therefore I told thee this great lie, thinking thou wouldst believe it. Wulfhere is Edbert's son."

Peada laughed again.

"Could Solomon himself make an angry woman confess herself a liar?" he asked. "Out of her own mouth she has judged herself; take her away and slay her."

When she saw she was tricked she wept and wailed again.

"Kill me, but spare my child," she pleaded, "for he at least is innocent."

"What," he sneered, "is this not the grandson of Penda, and will he not one day want my throne? Take away the brat also and slay him!".

Two soldiers carried them off, the child wailing bitterly, the mother tearing her hair and her kirtle and screeching in her mad sorrow. They took them away and slew them; and afterward when Wulfhere heard the whole sad tale from Immin, he broke down and wept bitter tears for Imogen, and for his little son.

Ah, if thou hast a wife, lord, love her and give her no cause to be jealous of thee. Remember that it is love to thee that causes her jealousy, for if she does not love thee jealousy will not trouble her. And if her jealousy of which thou art the cause bring trouble to thee and her, remember too that thou art much to blame, it may be more to blame by far than she is.

Peada ordered Offa, one of his strongest champions, to take five hundred men and travel to the village where Wulfhere was.

"Go ye and slay this Wulfhere," he ordered. "Bring his body to me here that I may know that he is dead. Bring also Elflaeda the beautiful, and Edbert the traitor. Go now this very hour, and see ye return before the month is out."

Offa the captain bowed and shouted an order; five hundred men from the regiment before him leaped forward and at a quick pace marched along the road that led to Hwicce.

THE moon was setting on the hills of Hwicce. Eanhere stood on the rock before his hut on the Bear Mountain looking toward the east. Mercia lay there and Siccandun, Peada's town, and in that town was Elgiva the woman of his love. Sad were his thoughts that day. Since love had entered his heart happiness had fled from him. What was she doing now in Siccandun? Was Peada with her thrusting his hateful presence upon her? Did he abuse her? Did he treat her well? No doubt she was lying on her couch now fast asleep. He tried to picture her, and long he gazed on the lovely scene his thoughts spread before him. Then as he thought of Peada lying at her side, a lump came up into his throat and choked him. Yes, he would make ready now at once and go disguised to Siccandun, and find what news there might be of her. It may be that even now she needed his aid.

Then his thoughts wandered again to Wulfhere, his friend. Did that spy from Imogen tell the truth, or was all this tale of a piece with what that traitor soldier had told him before?

"Thy spy says that Elflaeda has turned up and is in Whichford; that Wulfhere has put away my sister Imogen, and has married her whom he told me was daughter to his own father; that Elflaeda was not Wulfhere's sister, but that he declared her to be so to deceive me, and Imogen. Is it all a lie, or is it truth? Alas, I know not! I will go to the village and see for myself. Imogen calls on me to avenge her on Wulfhere, but how can I slay my brother?" Thus Eanhere mused.

The bear, Fleet-Foot, rubbed his shaggy head against his master's hand. He patted the beast on the neck and put his arm about him.

"Ah, Fleet-Foot," he cried, "a better heart beats 'neath thy shaggy fur than under any man's skin that I know of. They call thee brute and beast, but thou art a true friend—the only true friend that I ever had. There is no deception in thy honest face, no lie upon thy tongue; no sensual love can turn thee false to me thy friend; yea, thou wouldst give thy very life to please Eanhere."

The bear suddenly pricked up his ears, and raising his head stared out toward the south. Eanhere also looked. Far off he could see in the bright moonlight a band of men, soldiers they were, for now and then a sword or a spear-blade caught the light of the setting moon and flashed it. Who could these men be? There must be about five hundred of them. They were soldiers and armed; they must therefore be on the warpath. They came from the east, therefore they were Mercians. Ha, he saw it all now. It was his sister's work; she had

threatened to bring Peada upon her false husband.

Aye, it was Wulfhere these men sought, and soon they would be upon him. He had but one hundred men in arms; they were not enough, especially if taken by surprize and most of them asleep. Whatever was true or false of the tales that were told of Wulfhere, Eanhere must warn him. It was too late now to summon the bears to go and attack the Mercians. Before he could get them half-way to the village the enemy would be there. No, he must go himself and warn his friend. He felt at his belt to see that Blood Ax was there, then bidding Fleet-Foot stay where he was he leaped from the rock and ran like the wind toward Whichford.

From rock to rock he leaped, he crashed through brush and thicket, he descended the hills in great flying bounds, he seemed to tread on air. A mighty spring and he was twenty feet into the river. It tossed and buffeted him for it was in flood, but he passed through the torrent like a salmon and was soon on the farther bank. A long breath and he was away again, running like a stag. The village lay right before him.

Ah, he was too late, the Mercians were drawn up in a half-circle between the town and himself. They had reached it before him. Yet he did not for a moment slacken his pace. The moon dropped down behind a hill. Something flew over the heads of the soldiers and crashed through the thicket before them, then disappeared.

"Ha, a wolf!" one whispered to a companion.

"Nay, it was too large for a wolf—it was a man," said the other.

"Fool, no man could leap so high! Listen!"

It was the voice of Eanhere that they heard, shouting as he ran down the street to waken the people of the town.

"Awake! Awake! The Mercians are upon you!"

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE GREAT FIGHT AT THE STAIR

DOWN the main street of the town ran Eanhere crying:

"Awake! Awake!"

Lights appeared in the houses as he went by, and frightened men and women and children stood in the doorways for a moment to listen again for his cry, then grasping what things they most treasured, fled deep into the forest toward the west.

Into the largest house on the street Eanhere entered, hoping to find Wulfhere there. Through the crowd of waking soldiers he rushed to a chamber at the back of the hall. There on a large couch he found Wulfhere and Elflaeda fast asleep. Ha, it was true then, his friend was perjured again! This was Wulfhere's wife and not his sister, and for this woman he had done Imogen foul wrong, and deceived his friend. Eanhere half-turned to leave them to the doom that was fast rushing on them, but once more his better nature showed itself.

"Awake! Awake!" he cried almost in Wulfhere's ear.

Both sat up rubbing their eyes. The soldiers also by this were up. Eanhere explained as briefly as he could.

"On with thy bearskin!" he shouted to Wulfhere. "We must cut a way through these men and make for the Bear Mountain. If we fly to the west they will only overtake us in time and capture us; let us make for the mountain and call out the bears."

Wulfhere shouted an order to the soldiers who looked rather surprised to see him clad in his huge bearskin, then grasping Great Sword in his right hand and bidding me follow close behind with Elflaeda he took his stand beside Eanhere, and together they marched from the hall. I and my daughter followed, then came the soldiers. Outside we formed up in a great wedge; the brothers formed the point, immediately behind them I and Elflaeda followed, and behind us came the hundred Hwiccans.

The enemy were now charging down the street in our direction. With a roar and a crash our wedge drove into them till we were quite through, though many on both sides fell. Yes, we were through before Peada's men quite realized it, and were flying straight for the mountains. The cry went up among the Mercians that Wulfhere had escaped. They hastily gathered their forces together and pursued us. We had but a short start, yet we made good speed in spite of Elflaeda, who could not run as we did and whom we had to carry a good part of the way.

The moon had gone down but the stars shone brightly enough for our pursuers to

keep us well in sight, and we saw they gained upon us. At last we reached the river. Wulfhere supported Elfleada across and Eanhere gave me help, for my withered arm was useless and never had I been much of a swimmer anyway. Ten of our men were drowned, the rest climbed up the farther bank with us.

"Here we must make a stand," said Eanhere to his friends. "Go thou and take thy father and this woman"—he could not say "thy wife"—"and bar them in the hut, then call the bears. I and the soldiers that remain will hold the Mercians in check here."

"It is well, my brother," Wulfhere answered. "Do thy best till I join thee with the bears."

I would have stayed but he swept me onward with him, one arm holding Elflaeda close against his shoulder, and with the other pushing me forward. We heard the shouts behind us and knew that our pursuers had reached the river bank. A little later as we fled I turned my head and saw Eanhere and his men slashing at them in the water as they strove to come up the bank. Wulfhere hearing the sound of battle turned his head also, and slackened his pace. I thought he was about to stop and lay his burden down to return to his friend's side, for well I knew he felt ashamed to leave him thus.

"On, man," I panted, "remember thou must save her!"

He took a look at her pale face as she lay limp in his arms, for she had fainted.

"Aye, I must save her," he said, "even though my brother perish." And on we went again.

We climbed the hill till we came to a kind of natural staircase some twenty feet wide, with a narrow wall of rock in the midst. A great beast, brown and white leaped out of the shadows at us.

"Down Fleet-Foot!" Wulfhere shouted, and the bear—for a bear it was, the hugest that I ever saw—drew back.

"Fear not, my father," said Wulfhere, "while I am with thee he will not harm thee; only put up thy sword."

We climbed the stairway to the top of the rock, and rushing across the level above we entered the hut that lay around a corner of the hill. Here he laid Elflaeda gently down upon a couch.

"My father, see to her," he said. "There is water in yonder pitcher. Stay with her 'till I come again, if indeed I come at all, and see thou bar the door behind me."

He took a hasty gulp of water from the pitcher, then sped from the hut and out upon the rock overlooking the valley beyond. I barred the door and peeped out of the window. Fleet-Foot stood beside his master, his head erect as if he heard strange sounds and felt that something new was in the wind. I heard Wulfhere give a strange loud call that echoed through the valley, and then a most strange thing occurred. Out from the face of the mountain opposite, great shadowy forms emerged. They sped across the valley by scores and hundreds.

Up the steep cliff they went with great leaps to the place where Wulfhere stood. They fawned upon him and licked his hands. Some standing on their hind legs overtopped him and rubbed their noses in his face. Then with a loud call such as hunters use to their hounds he turned and ran toward the gorge up which we had come, the great pack lumbering at his heels. Full two hundred huge beasts were there, and though they disappeared soon from my sight, for a long time I could hear the thunder of their tread till gradually it died away, and all was silence.

I turned to Elflaeda, who still lay unconscious on the couch of bearskins. I poured some water down her throat and splashed some in her face. For a long time I worked with her, till at last she revived and sat up.

"Where am I? What has happened?" she asked.

"Thou art safe, daughter, lie down again," I said.

Then she seemed to realize all that had happened, and wept bitterly.

"Wulfhere, where is he?" she cried.

"He has returned to help his brother; he will not be long, my daughter, he will come again."

"Ah, he is dead!" she wailed. "Never will he return alive to me. Unhappy that I am to bring him to this fate. Wulfhere! Wulfhere!"

Do what I could I could not comfort her.

MEANWHILE Wulfhere sped down the mountain path, his army at his heels. He was just in time, for he found Eanhere alone. He had his back against a rock and Blood Ax hissed and crashed. Around him lay the bodies of

the Hwiccans, and a pile of dead Mercians also. He himself would have been dead before this had the Mercian captain not given orders that he should be taken alive.

"Slay him not but take him," he had commanded. "He will make a great warrior for Peada the king."

A cry of dismay went up from the enemies' ranks as they saw the bears pour down the pass like a torrent upon them, Wulfhere at their head.

"They are wizards! We can not fight against wizards!" some of them cried.

"They are bears!" roared the captain. "What, are ye turned cowards that ye fear a pack of bears?"

Bears or wizards, the Mercians knew that they must fight, and fight they did like men.

The sun as it rose that morning saw a fearful and amazing sight; two hundred and forty great beasts, brown and white, with many a snarl and grunt and growl, led by two mighty men clad like themselves in bearskins, with shouts and yells, contending with full three hundred and fifty mail-clad Mercians. Teeth against spears, swords and axes against long claws and teeth, fur hide against chain-mail, one could hear the rending of armor, the tearing of flesh, the crunching of men's bones, and with it all the hissing of steel, the shouts of men, the cries of beasts in mortal agony.

Everywhere were the Bear Brethren, leading their children on, and wherever they led, men went down like grass before the reapers, till Great Sword and Blood Ax were dulled on the bones of their foes.

"At them, my children!" Wulfhere cried. "A royal feast will ye have this day, for their flesh is tender and their blood is warm to drink!"

"Slay, slay, my people!" shouted Eanhere. "Slay them and spare not! 'Tis a glorious fight and the long sleep of death is before you!"

How long that fight continued I know not, but the brethren stood alone at last. Not a bear had fled, yet not one stood with them now. The carcasses of the bear people lay scattered about the place, each one on the body of a Mercian. Now the cry of a dying man was heard, and now the last moan of a bear. The battle had ceased. Offa, the Mercian, stood a little way off with but eighteen of his men, resting from their utter exhaustion. The brethren stood regarding them, panting and leaning on their weapons. Their bearskins were cut in shreds, and their faces were streaming with sweat and blood.

"Come, my brother, let us up to the hut."

It was Wulfhere that spoke.

"Nay, we will die here," Eanhere answered.

"Come," urged Wulfhere again, "we will have a chance at the stair."

The two walked slowly up the gorge till they stood at the head of the stair. Offa and his men watched them go but were too weary to follow them.

"Let us sit now and take breath," said Wulfhere. "They will be here anon." And they sat them down on a great stone and were silent for a while.

"Wulfhere, my brother, this will be my last fight, for in this fight I die," Eanhere said. "With a great love have I loved thee, Wulfhere, and I would fain die loving thee still, even to the end. Certain tales have come to me from those who would poison my friendship toward thee. Tell me now, before I die that these tales are false. Elflaeda—is she thy wife—and didst thou not tell me that she was thy sister? They say thou didst lie to me, brother, to deceive me. Tell me of Imogen, my sister, also. I have heard her story, now let me hear thine, for I would go to my death believing thee true, Wulfhere.

"Ah, my brother, it is a long story," Wulfhere answered, "and short is the time we have to tell it, but thy love at this moment I value above everything, my brother. Let me tell thee the tale."

He told Eanhere all, hiding nothing, nor seeking to excuse himself from blame, but taking to himself even more blame than by rights was his. At last it was finished.

"Now, thou hast heard the tale, Eanhere. Cruelly have I treated thy sister, and on account of her I will carry sorrow with me to the grave; but in the matter of Elflaeda not being my sister, I deceived thee not, Eanhere, for I knew not that I was Penda's son and not Edbert's till Edbert told me only three months ago. Then I was wroth with Imogen for her sharp words cut me deep, and when spies were set upon me, and attempts made to kill me, I believed it was she who set them on, and it made me hate her.

"Then when Elflaeda came whom I had loved years ago when we were children together, and had loved ever since, though for

long I thought her dead, and when I learned that she was no sister to me, my love for her seemed to grow till my heart almost burst to contain it. That is why I took her to wife, my friend. I have been much to blame, that I know, Eanhere, but death has opened his door and he beckons us in, and within this same hour one or both of us must enter. Forgive me, my brother."

He held out his hand and his friend grasped it.

"I forgive thee, Wulfhere," he answered. "I ask thy forgiveness also for doubting thy love. Well do I know—for I have had reason—what the spell of a woman will work on a man. Alas, my poor sister! I mourn her sad lot, yet I blame thee not. In thy place I could not have done otherwise than thou didst. We will go hand in hand to Valhalla, Wulfhere, or if I go alone I will wait for thee there."

All the bitterness and the ache had passed out of their hearts; in the presence of death they were brothers again. For a while they sat silent, then Eanhere with wet eyes leaned over toward his friend.

"Elgiva!" he whispered hoarsely. "Take her from that brute, Peada, and if aught happens to make thee wifeless take her to thee, my brother, and love her, for well she has loved thee."

"I will do it, my brother," Wulfhere answered.

A look of love and gratitude lit up the Bear's face as he grasped his friend's hand. He knew he was going to his death,but now he could die happy.

"They come," said Eanhere quietly as he rose. "Guard this side, brother; I will guard that."

A long rocky wall about three feet high, as I have already told you, lords, stretched from the top of the stairs to the bottom, and lay exactly in the center. Eanhere took the left, Wulfhere the right. They had already thrown off their bearskins, for the bears being dead the brethren had no further use for them; indeed they had been torn and cut into so many strips that these hampered their strokes. A glorious pair they looked standing there together, waiting for the foe. The Mercians paused when they reached the foot of the stair and the captain looked up in admiration.

"Shame it is," he said to the thane beside him, "shame it is that we must fight nineteen men against two. I would give my right arm if I could spare them both, for never did I see such a splendid pair, and never did two men fight as they fought. Ho, there, Wulfhere and thy brother," he called, "why do ye wait here for death? The mountains are behind you, 'tis madness to stay."

"We fly not," they answered grimly.

"'Tis the woman," said the thane to Offa, "'tis not the first time this woman has sent good men to their death."

"Aye, the woman, and we must take her. She lies in hiding up there—she and Edbert."

Then turning to his men—

"Forward!" he shouted.

THE Mercians made a rush up the steps. The crash of an ax is heard as it tears through helm and skull, and the *shish* of a sword piercing bone and flesh.

"Ha, Mercian, Blood Ax gives thee greeting!" roared Eanhere.

"Hearty greetings to thee, friend!" laughs Wulfhere as he draws his sword from the breast of his adversary.

Two men roll backward down the steps, but two more come on.

Wulfhere's sword pierces through his opponent's mouth and sticks out at the back of his neck.

"A poor sword-swallower!" he shouts.

"Take off thy hat to thy betters!" roars Eanhere as Blood Ax comes down on the neck of the next Mercian, shearing his head from his shoulders.

"Ha! I did not ask thee to take off thy head!"

The spear of the next Mercian misses Eanhere's shield and pierces him in the thigh.

"Take that!" the soldier shouts.

"Take that!" roars Eanhere as Blood Ax sinks deep into the Mercian's shoulder and he topples into the arms of his companions.

"Good night to thee, thane, and a happy journey to the shades," cries Wulfhere, as Offa's thane goes down before Great Sword, and joins the host of the dead.

"Lock shields and rush them!" shouts Offa.

Four men men fell before the brethren were driven back from the head of the stair; but now the Mercians are up, and the brothers stand back to back against eight men.

Offa stands by and cheers on his warriors, aye, and he gives a cheer too now and then for the brethren.

"Rush them, Mercians!" he cries. "Ha, a good stroke, Bear! Wigmund! Cenred! In with your shields before you! Wulfhere, thou art a wonder! Now! Now! Down with him!" as Eanhere sinks to his knee. "Wow! Bear thou art a devil!" as Eanhere slips like a snake out of danger and brains his opponent. "Burhred! Cnebba! Keep them engaged in front! You, Centwin and Hunbert, charge in at the sides and separate them!"

But Great Sword and Blood Ax bar the way on front and flank, and the brothers refuse to be separated. Only four of the enemy are left, and Offa, their captain.

"Curse you!" he shouts, "are ye boys that ye let two men beat you?"

"Ha! Well struck, Wigmund! Thou art done for now, Bear!"

Eanhere received a terrible sword-thrust in the side from which the blood poured in a torrent. He reeled with his hand on the wound.

"Brother," he gasps, "I am done. One more stroke!" he cries, and hurls his ax with all his remaining strength in the face of the man who wounded him. Wigmund's head smashes up like a broken egg, and his brains and blood bespatter the ground.

Eanhere sinks to his knee, then falls prostrate on his back upon the ground.

An awful rage seizes Wulfhere as he sees his brother fall. He roars like a lion in his wrath and hurls his shield at his nearest foe. It hits him on the face and he falls. With both hands on Great Sword, Wulfhere rushes on the other two. *Swish!* The sword-arm of the first drops from his body and the good sword sinks deep into his side. *Crash!* And Great Sword cuts through shield, ax-helve and hauberk, and the last man but one goes down.

That one is Offa, the captain.

"That was a mighty stroke, Wulfhere; not Penda himself could have hit so hard a blow," said Offa as he raised his shield and braced himself to receive Wulfhere's onslaught.

The madness of the berserker was in Wulfhere's attack, and the recklessness also. His brain was all aflame and the fire flashed from his eyes and the sparks from his sword as he rained blow on blow on his adversary's shield, but that shield was one such as Penda carried, heavy and strong as steel could make it, and Offa knew how to meet the blows that fell so as to save his target. He was a strong man and a skilful swordsman, and he knew that the fury of this storm must pass, for Wulfhere must be by now a weary man, weary from much fighting.

Perhaps Wulfhere forgot his friend for a time in the joy of meeting a foeman worthy of himself, for his great wrath slowly passed away and he began to sing, beating time with his sword the while on Offa's shield and weapon; and the song that he sang was the old war-song of Mercia.

> "Penda the Terrible,
> Penda the Glorious,
> Woden the War-god's son,
> Pride of old Mercia."

Offa opened his mouth and his eyes in wonder as the song went on. He was panting now and his breath came in gasps. Wulfhere's fury had passed but the force of his onslaught was as heavy as ever. Would the man never tire, thought Offa. If he did not soon, he, Offa, was a dead man. There was no getting in behind a sword like that. But why did he sing that song?

> "Worthy to follow, he,
> Into the battle.
> Red shall our spear-points be
> In blood of the foe."

"Why dost thou sing that song, Hwiccan?" Offa asked between gasps.

"Because I am Penda's son, fool, and no Hwiccan!"

The man gasped now in astonishment, and dropped his sword. Wulfhere had almost shorn him in two if he had not twisted his sword in his hand so that it barely grazed the Mercian's shoulder, for he would not slay an unarmed man.

"What aileth thee?" he growled. "Pick up thy sword."

"Penda's son! Penda's son!" the man repeated. "Thou hast the look of Penda, and Penda's strength is in thee," he went on, still staring into Wulfhere's face. "Nay, but it can not be. Thou art a liar, Hwiccan!" And he picked up his sword, swung it, and rushed on Wulfhere.

Wulfhere's great strength that had been kept up by the excitement of the battle, began to fail. Was it any wonder, lords? What man could fight as he fought now for

hours, and not give out at last? His strength began to fail, and the Mercian captain, made mad by his wounds, began to press him sorely. At last a fierce blow landed on Wulfhere's head and made him stagger. He gathered up his last remaining force and drove Great Sword deep into Offa's body. The Mercian fell, then rose again upon one knee and hurled his sword at Wulfhere, then fell back once more on the ground and lay there.

Now Wulfhere saw the sword come hissing toward him. He saw it as he leaned upon Great Sword and watched the Mercian, but had it been a mountain it had been all the same. His last remaining strength had gone with that last thrust. Weak as an infant he stood there, yea, weaker, for he could not move a limb. The sword-point took him in the middle of the forehead; a darkness came about him; he fell and lay still with the weapon fastened in his brain.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

HOW WIG AND BALDRIC CAME TO SICCANDUN

AS FOR Elflaeda and me we heard the sounds of the battle as it raged but could see nothing because the hut lay around the corner of the hill. Time and again I strove to go to my son's help, but Elflaeda clung about my neck.

"Leave me not my father, or I shall die!" she cried, so I stayed with her.

Then there came silence without. We knew the fight was over and we waited. Would it be my son who would come or would it be the Mercians? I went again to the window to watch, resolved that neither of us would fall alive into their hands if Wulfhere had been killed. There was no sound without. With the exception of Elflaeda's sobbing there was deep stillness on every side like the stillness of the tomb.

I started to unbar the door. Elflaeda looked up from the couch.

"What doest thou, my father?" she asked.

"I go to seek Wulfhere," I answered.

She rose and came toward me.

"I go with thee," she said.

I would have kept her back for I feared Wulfhere was dead and that the sight of him lying stark and cold would kill her, but she wiped her tears from her eyes and set her lips and followed. At the head of the stair we found him, lords, lying upon his side, the sword still clinging to his head. His body was covered with blood and his armor was ripped and torn in a score of places, showing great wounds beneath. I thrust myself before Elflaeda that she might not see, but she pushed past me and fell on the torn and mangled body before us, crying:

"Wulfhere! Wulfhere!" My husband, speak to me! Ah, God, he is dead!"

Not a tear did she shed, but a strange, unnatural look came into her eyes as she rose to her feet. First she looked at me and then at the dead, and a shriek like a maniac's laugh came from her lips. I lifted the sword and tugged it away from his head. She sat on the ground and took the poor head in her hands and laid it upon her knee. She fondled it and crooned to it a while as an infant croons to its doll, then she laid it gently on the earth and stood up once more. She pressed her hand first to her head and then to her heart, then swayed and fell across her husband's body; and when I spoke to her she answered me not; and when I raised her up—she was dead.

Alone in the world—once more alone. A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. Growing old and feeble and hungering for love, love that had come with these two and with them had gone leaving me forsaken and desolate, and crushed like a trampled leaf. The well of my tears was dry, and my heart was broken. In that hour, lords, full twenty years were added to my life, and my body, once so erect and strong, became quite bent and feeble. I laid myself down beside my daughter, and pillowed my head beside hers on his breast.

How long I lay there unconscious I know not; perhaps an hour, it may have been two, or three; but when consciousness came I half-dragged, half-carried Elflaeda's body back to the hut. I laid it on the couch and went back for Wulfhere's, but so feeble was I that I could not move it.

"I must go down to the village for help," I said.

Among lifeless bodies I picked my way. On the stair I had to climb over them to get to the bottom. Slowly, and with much weakness and pain I went down the path that led to the river, wondering how I should cross. Turning a corner of the hill I came into full view of the battleground of that morning. Men and bears were heaped up

in the narrow gorge. Here was a bear with a sword thrust clean through its body; there another with an ax-blade hidden in its bowels; here a soldier ripped open from breast to thigh; there another with head and arm chewed off.

Fearful and horrible had been the carnage there, surely a battle like that had never been fought before. Yet so heavy did my sorrow lie upon me I looked on those sights unmoved. At last I came to the river and wrung my hands, for how could I cross that torrent? I followed the stream for full three miles till I came to a ford, and there I crossed. I wandered on till the night fell and I could go no further, so I lay myself down and from very weariness slept.

The sun was rising when I woke, and at ten o'clock that day I reached the town. Most of the people had returned to their homes, but were on the watch lest Penda's men should return. I told them what had happened and begged that some of them would go back with me to get the bodies of my son and daughter and bear them to Whichford for burial, or bury them there in the mountains. They feared to go to that haunted place, but seven men volunteered at last, and when I had rested and eaten we started.

How we reached that place I need not tell, lords, indeed, I hardly know myself, but this I know, the men had to carry me a great part of the way. Reach it we did though at last, but when we came to the spot where the body of Wulfhere had lain—the body was gone. The body of Offa, the Mercian captain, also was missing. We went to the hut and found the lifeless form of Elflaeda still lying there on the couch, but a great bearskin now covered her and her hands had been crossed on her breast. Clearly some one had been there, but who? Men did not tread those hills.

None but these few dead Mercians had in a hundred years climbed up so far, none that is, save only Wulfhere and his brother, and Osred and Thorkell. I sent four of the villagers to scour the hills around to see if any trace of the two could be found, and while they were absent we hunted among the dead. The body of Eanhere we found with a bearskin laid over him and his hands folded on his breast. At Eanhere's side lay the dead form of the bear Fleet-Foot, who had dragged himself back from the gorge below to die at his master's side.

We dug a grave in a little grove by the side of the hut, and we wrapped the hero's body in the bearskin and buried him there with Blood Ax at his belt. And another grave we dug near by, and my daughter—my sweet and lovely Elflaeda—we laid in that grave. Ah, me! Ah, me! Forgive my weakness, lords. Then we came away from that place. The four villagers returned to say they could find no trace of those they sought. They offered to seek farther, but I said:

"Nay, what need? Is he not dead?"

And so we returned to the village. There for a month I lay sick unto death, but thanks to the gentle care of the people I recovered, and in another month a great part of my strength came to me again, or as much of it as a man of my years who had passed through so much travail and sorrow could expect.

And now the councilors of Hwicce came from Worcester to me to get counsel and advice, for Peada they said had declared war against them and would soon be at their gates.

"It was thy counsel," they said "that prevailed against Penda at Winwedfield, and thou knowest better than we the strength of the Mercians. Moreover Wulfhere is dead and we have no one who can lead us as he did."

Then lords, I spoke bitterly to them. I showed them their folly and wickedness in casting off him who alone could be their savior.

"I have no counsel to give you, lords," I said, "but this I can tell you, and I know that shortly it will come to pass—the day is not far away when Hwicce will cease to be a nation, for the lion of Mercia will lay his paw across the land, and his shadow will cover it."

They turned and departed without a word, for they knew in their hearts that my prophecy was like to be fulfilled, and that before long. I little dreamed myself in what way it would come.

TWO months the rumor of strange doings in Mercia came to my ears. It was said that Peada was dead and that another set up in his place. I marveled much who that other could be for report gave no name. One day, a week later, a messenger came from Immin bidding me hasten to Siccandun without an

hour's delay. I tried to question the messenger but he would not stay, and much wondering I made ready to go to Peada's town.

Immin himself came to meet me, and at the Watling Street, two leagues from Siccandun, I found him. There as we rested before the next day's journey he told me what had befallen in Mercia. Two weeks before Easter two men strong and grim, with full beards and long swords, entered the city and offered their services to Peada. It was noticed that the taller and larger of the two wore a wide thick leather band buckled tightly about his head and coming down low on his forehead, the other had a belt about his waist wider on the left side by full two inches than on the right.

Grim and stark they looked as they stood before the king, the one with a perpetual scowl on his face, silent and still, the other twirling his long sword about his fingers. It was in the great hall that they met the king. He sat with his wife there on a throne to receive his captains and give them words of cheer before they left for the war against Hwicce.

"Whom have we here?" asked Peada as the two marched up the hall and stood before him.

"Great King, we are two brethren, and we seek service in thy army," answered the dark man.

"Brethren forsooth," laughed the king, "ye are as like two brethren as a white crow is like a black one."

"Right, King! White or black all crows are brethren," the dark warrior replied.

"What is thy name?"

"My name is Baldric and my brother's Wig."

Peada laughed again.

"We might have known those were your names; they are writ large upon your bodies. A strange baldric thou wearest, Baldric, and, friend Wig, thy wig will wiggle off an it come down much lower."

Peada's thanes laughed with the king, and Baldric grinned, but Wig only scowled the more.

"Ye are Northumbrians by your names," said Peada.

"We are, King."

"Thou doest all the talking, Baldric, has thy brother Wig no tongue?"

"Aye, but he carries it in his hand."

Peada looked at Wig's great sword as it flashed back the fire from the hearth.

"A long tongue," he said, "and a tongue of flame. I could sorrow for the man who feels its lick."

"Right, King."

"Canst fight, Baldric and Wig?"

"Aye, any four in Mercia," answered Baldric.

An angry murmur went around among the lords and thanes, and Eafa said aloud—

"The braggart lies!"

"Silence!" roared Peada. "Braggarts or not these are bold fellows, and we are much in need of such as they just now."

Now while this talk was going on Wig's eyes were fixed intently on the queen's, except when Peada looked at him. The queen's eyes too were fixed upon Wig's face as if she tried to read who he was and what his mission there. At first she seemed much agitated, then restrained herself by an effort. Peada was about to assign the men to Immin's regiment, for he would trust no strangers about him, when the queen arose and asked a boon.

"It is yours, my lady, before the asking," he returned.

He had grown to respect, if not to love, this woman who despised him.

"These two are my countrymen," she said. "I ask that they be added to my guard."

Another look passed between Wig and the queen as the king appointed the Northumbrians as she requested.

That night Elgiva sent for them and talked long with them, and on Easter night when it was their turn to stand guard at her door, Peada being asleep at her side, she arose from her couch and let them in. They seized and gagged him, and it being the dead of night they carried him out through the square to the rock overlooking the lake. The night was dark, for there had been rain, but now the clouds began to scatter and the moon was rising. They waited there till the light grew strong, then led him close to the edge, and threatening him with instant death if he made the slightest outcry, they took the gag from his mouth.

"Look on me now and say who am I," growled Wig as he thrust his fierce face close into the face of the king.

Peada trembling with fear looked long at him.

"Wulfhere!" he whispered.

"Aye, Wulfhere am I, whose wife and

little one thou hast cruelly done to death; Wulfhere, whom thou didst drive over yonder precipice to take his death upon the rocks beneath—him and his friend; Wulfhere, against whom thou didst send Offa here and his Mercians that they might slay him in the Bear Mountain, and they slew his brother and well-nigh himself and the wife of his bosom died of the shock. Murderer of women and little children, where are those gone whom thou didst send to the Bear Mountain to slay me? They are gone to the place of the dead where thou too art going presently."

Now something of the spirit of Penda, his father, came to Peada and he answered—

"See, I am in thy power, slay me with thy sword."

"Nay, for that would be a man's death," answered Wulfhere, "and Great Sword does not drink the blood of murderers. I give thee the same choice that once thou gavest me. Leap over yonder cliff and take thy chance as I did."

Now he who could face death by the sword without flinching, trembled with great fear at the thought of that leap.

"Mercy! Mercy, Wulfhere!" he cried, and he fell on his knees before his tormentor. "Thy wife whom I slew, she swore that thou wert my brother. Wouldst slay thy brother and be accursed forever? Mercy!"

"No brother art thou to me, but a wretch and a coward and a murderer. The blood of my wife and child, and the blood of my brother and my love cry out for vengeance upon thee. Leap, man, now no longer a king, for know that I, Wulfhere, will sit presently upon thy throne?"

"But she came to betray thee!" Peada cried.

"What was that to thee, murderer?"

Now when Peada saw that he could not prevail with Wulfhere, he turned to Offa.

"Offa, wilt thou murder thy king who made thee a thane and a captain?" he pleaded.

"And that murdered my brother also," answered Offa, "and sent me to die in the mountains. To kill thee is no murder, thou dog!"

Then began Peada to curse the woman who had betrayed him and the men who would send him to death, and him, still screaming out curses and crying for aid they seized, one on each side, and hurled him far out from the edge of the cliff. Still screaming he disappeared from their view in the shadows below, and they heard the heavy thud of his body as it fell on the stones of the shore.

Thus died Peada.

CHAPTER XXXIX

EDBERT FINISHES HIS TALE

WULFHERE and Offa, his friend, fled from the town and hid that night in the forest. They found a peasant living in the woods and gave him a reward to take a message to Immin. That night came Immin to them and he knew Wulfhere. In a week's time all the town knew that Wulfhere was without the gates, and that he was the son of Penda. Then Immin brought him in and the people shouted as he came—

"Hail, son of Penda!"

They made him king, lords, and set him up on Penda's throne, while all his thanes bowed their heads before him and named him "lord."

That same day there came a lady before him clothed in black, with a heavy veil over her face. It was Elgiva, the queen. She bowed to him and in a sad voice craved to be allowed to enter the Christian sisterhood that Peada had established there; but he stood up and taking her by the hand he led her to the seat beside his throne, and in the ears of all his lords he said aloud—

"Lady, it is my will that thou sit here henceforth."

A great shout went up that rang through all the hall when the people heard his words, for they had learned to love that gentle lady and they approved that she should still be queen. She kneeled upon one knee before Wulfhere and drew aside her veil to kiss his hand, but he raised her up again and on her pale white brow he placed his lips, then led her back again to her seat, and the great hall rang again with the shouts of the lords and thanes.

Thus after many years of sorrow and trouble, Elgiva found her heart's desire at last and became wife to Wulfhere. True, she had betrayed, or meant to betray her father Osric, but long since in sorrow had she repented of that foul act. True too, she had opened the door to Wulfhere to take Peada, but no one looked on that as any sin. Peada had been a tyrant and a murderer, and she had only handed him over to justice.

Yea, they honored her for it and called her their deliverer, for she had done that which strong men had failed to do through fear. And she had done it, lords, because Wulfhere had asked it of her; him she loved better than her own soul, and him she could not deny. And though Peada had done much for the church, yet had he been cruel too with the monks; and Immin told me that passing their chapel one day he heard them chanting the song of Deborah; and one voice he heard rising above the rest, and it sang—

"Blessed above women shall Elgiva the wife of Wulfhere the Mercian be, yea, blessed shall she be above women."

And though he waited to hear the abbot reprove the bold singer yet the abbot reproved him not, for the voice was the voice of the abbot himself.

There is much to be told yet—much to be told—but my voice grows weak and I must finish. In a few words let me tell the rest, for the storm is now over and I know ye are anxious to get on your way, and perchance you are weary of this tale.

How did Wulfhere and Offa get back from the Bear Mountain? I will tell you, lords, in a few words. After I had gone to get help from Whichford, Offa, the captain, revived. His wound was a bad one, but the sword had not struck any vital spot. He sat up, and tearing a piece of cloth from his tunic he put it over the wound and held it in place with his belt, then weak though he was he stood up and walked over to Wulfhere. Offa looked long in his face.

"He said he was Penda's son," he mused. "I know not how it can be yet verily I do believe it is so, for like Penda he looks and like him he fights. There is a mystery here."

He felt Wulfhere's heart.

"He is not yet dead; his heart beats," he said. "If only I had a little water I might revive him."

Offa walked slowly back along the path till he caught sight of the hut, and going to it he entered. He was amazed to find there the body of a beautiful woman lying on the couch.

"Elflaeda!" he exclaimed. "Death has won the loveliest maid in all England for bride, and Peada has lost her."

He found the pitcher of water there, and taking but a mouthful he carried the rest to Wulfhere. He poured some between Wulfhere's lips and sprinkled some on his face. To his great joy Wulfhere opened his eyes, then in a little while sat up. Offa bound up his head, for a great hole gaped in the middle of his brow, and with every effort he made the brain protruded from the hole. Afterward he wore a wide strap of leather across his forehead with a ribbon of steel over it, and for this he was ofttimes called Wulfhere Ironhead.

They made their way back to the hut where they found the body of Elflaeda. A long time Wulfhere wept over it, and Offa had much ado to tear him away, but after spreading a bearskin over her body he got him away at last. Another bearskin they carried out and with it they covered the body of Eanhere. Wulfhere sobbed again like a child over his friend.

"Ah, my brother, my brother!" he cried. "Dearer to me than all, save Elflaeda, my love, thou art dead, alas, alas! Thou wilt never return to me, Eanhere, but I will go to thee, thou bravest of warriors and most faithful of friends!"

They placed Eanhere's hands across his breast and wrapped the bear rug round him, then putting Blood Ax at his side they left him, and made their way painfully and wearily down the path, till after many rests they came to old Thorkell's hut. There for two months they stayed nursing each other till they began to grow strong once more; then when their strength had returned they went to Siccandun, Peada's town, and were made soldiers of the queen's guard.

Oftentimes she called them to her, and she spoke privately to them. For Wulfhere's sake Elgiva agreed to put a sleeping-draft into Peada's mead that night, and to admit Wulfhere and Offa to the chamber. Soundly enough the king slept till they had seized and gagged him and dragged him down to the lake's edge, when he became very much awake. The rest ye know, lords.

WULFHERE when he felt himself strong enough expelled all the Northumbrian thanes who had been sent by Oswy to govern the other parts of Mercia. He set up his own earls over his lands and all old Mercia was won back from its enemies. Moreover he overcame the East Saxons to the south under their kings Sighere and Sebbi. To that people he sent Jaruman, the bishop, who had succeeded Bishop Trumhere in Mercia, to bring back

the East Saxons to the true faith from which they had fallen. Thus that nation became Christian again.

The South Saxons too yielded to Wulfhere's arms, and their king, Ethelwalch, desiring to become a Christian, Wulfhere stood as his godfather, and gave him beside his own kingdom, the Isle of Wight and the Province of Meanwara which he had taken from the West Saxons. The chief captains and the soldiers of that nation became Christians, and were baptized.

At Pontesbury Wulfhere fought a battle against Kenwal, King of the West Saxons, and as far as Ashdown pursued him, and drove him into the extreme west of his land. Thus Wulfhere became overlord also of Wessex. The Hwiccans also, as I had foretold a few years before, sent to him to acknowledge him overlord.

Thus did Wulfhere extend the borders of Mercia, and the dominions which Penda had gained and lost were won again, and much more land beside.

Now Wulfhere brought Ceadda, sometimes called Chad, a follower of Aldan the Holy, to Mercia, and greatly did that pious bishop bless the land and the people. A great abbey was built at Crowland, and one of surpassing beauty and stateliness at Medhamstead now called Peterborough from the name of the abbey, St. Peter's. In Evesham also an abbey was built.

As much as Penda had done for paganism and against the religion of Christ, so much and more did Wulfhere for the Christian faith and against the religion of Thunar and Woden; and by as much as the dominions and the wealth and power of David exceeded those of Saul the King of Israel before him, by so much did Wulfhere's power and wealth and virtues and dominions exceed those of Penda. And the land at last had peace, lords, for having caused his enemies to fear him, Wulfhere turned from wars and battles to train his people in more useful pursuits.

He taught them how to drain their lands and till them to best advantage, and in fields that for many ages past had been swamps and bogs and fens now the golden corn was raised. And the people far and near throughout his kingdom began to flourish and prosper, till they forgot all the woes Penda had brought upon them, and they learned to bless God for Wulfhere and his sweet queen Elgiva. For it was she who spurred him on to all these deeds of good, nor would she let him rest one moment in the good work. The common people called her Eormengild, for they said—

"She is a golden gift to us from God above."

And after she died she was St. Eormengild to them, and is so to this day. She died in childbirth some years after she was wed to Wulfhere. He mourned with his people at her death, for he had learned to love her because of her devotion to him and to others; but never had he loved her as he loved Elflaeda, my daughter. His thoughts were constantly upon that grave away up in the Bear Mountain in Hwicce. A year after Elgiva's death he took a company of men with him and made the long journey to the Hwiccan Hills. He raised the bones of Elflaeda and Eanhere and buried them beneath the chancel of the church in Medhamstead beside the body of Elgiva, and there they lie, lords, to this day.

Then came that thrice-accursed Escwin, King of Wessex, into Wulfhere's domains. A terrible battle was fought at Bedwin and the invader was beaten and his army scattered, but Wulfhere, who ever would be in the thick of the fight exposing himself recklessly to the swords and spears of the enemy, was struck down by a fearful blow on the forehead. From that blow he never recovered, and that same year, being the year of our Lord six hundred and seventy-five, six months after the battle, he died. I was with him, lords, with him to the last, and when I bent down to kiss his poor shattered brow I heard him whisper Elflaeda's name as he breathed his last.

We took his body and made another grave in the chancel beside Elflaeda's grave and we laid his body there. Ethelred, his brother, a good man and a true sits on his throne, but I—I could stay no more there, so I came to this place to wait here till the Lord should call me. And though I know that those two whom I loved so well are together again in Paradise, and are happy as they never could be here, yet I weep and I mourn their loss and pray the good God to take me to be with them. And I know that He hears my prayer, lords, for last night I could hear His voice, and He said—

"Edbert, I come for thee soon."

Ah, come quickly, come quickly, Lord Jesus!

THE old man closed his eyes and for a long time lay still; then suddenly he raised himself and sat up in the bed, supporting his weak frame with his right hand while with his left he shaded his eyes and gazed with fixed look into space.

"What is that light I see, lords?" he asked in an awed whisper. "It grows brighter and brighter as it shines all about. I thought it was night, lords, and surely my blindness is passing away for the light is far brighter than day. Hark, 'tis the voice of Wulfhere that is calling. I see him with arms outstretched, and with him at his side is Elflaeda my daughter. And the wife of my heart is there, and Elgiva, and Eanhere the brave. Hold me not—let me go—do ye not hear them call? Wulfhere, my son, I come!"

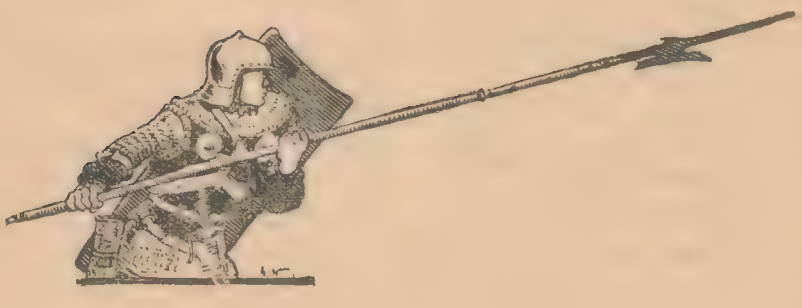
The old man fell back on his pillow. He was dead.

The silence was broken by a long sigh.

"My brother Wulfhere was a man, Offa," said the younger man thoughtfully.

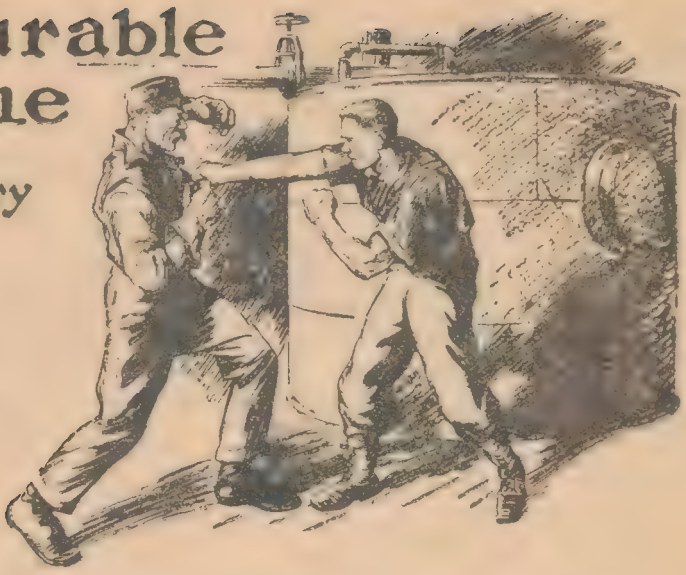
"Aye, that he was, King Ethelbert," confirmed the elder. "And to think it was my sword that split his head. Long since I would have smashed it for that sacrilegious blow but thy brother would not have it. 'Keep it,' he said, 'for the sword that has felled a son of Penda is a notable blade.' Ah, that was a man, lord, that was a man!"

THE END



The Ondurable Dane

By J. Clay Perry



HE HAD won the title of "The Durable Dane" in his five years in the ring but when he showed up, a cadaverous, battered, down-and-out has-been, at Christianson's boarding-house in Swango Falls, Sven Starks, the big Swede, star-boarder, rechristened him. Starks stole a line from a facetious sporting writer on the city daily. He dubbed Nelson "The On'durable Dane." That was the nearest Starks could get to "unendurable."

Every one laughed around the long table in the rag-carpeted dining-room. Sven Starks stood six feet four in his thick, flat-soled lumbermen's rubbers which he wore habitually because it was hard for him to find shoes of his size—and rubbers would stretch. Almost every one did laugh when Starks cracked a joke, or when Starks thought he had cracked a joke.

So Nels Nelson, The Durable Dane, in five seconds won a title to replace the proud pseudonym that it had taken him five years to earn. He became the "On'durable Dane" to the score of men and girls who boarded at Mrs. Christianson's and worked in the paper-mill and the pulp-mill.

There was only one person who did not laugh at the Swede's joke. That was Gloria Christianson, daughter of the house. She smiled, but it was a smile that told Nels Nelson she appreciated his good-natured grin at the joke on himself—and she brought him an extra cup of milk from the kitchen.

Nels Nelson was not particularly attractive in appearance, just at this time. He had started in the game a fair-haired, full-lipped clear-eyed youngster with a straight nose and an oval chin that had a cleft in it almost like a dimple, so like one that it had quite bewitched his feminine admirers. But Nelson would have nothing to do with women. His managers and trainers drew the line at women, quite unromantically and practically. To them women meant only one thing—ruin for a fighter.

Nels Nelson was a fighter. It was born in him. Somewhere back in the iron age of the Norsemen one of his blond-haired ancestors had won fame as a battler who never knew when he was beaten and he had handed down to his descendant, Nels Nelson, something of his own stubborn, never-say-die durability. It helped Nels win his title.

Five years of the prize-ring, meeting all comers of his class, the heavyweight class! Five years of battling, taking punishment, had let Nelson out a beaten man. And it was not women who did it, nor wine, nor song. It was the invisible fourth man in the ring, Father Time, who threw up the sponge, tossed the towel into Nelson's corner, counted him out and signified with uplifted hand that Nelson, The Durable Dane, was through.

Nelson's face bore evident marks of the heavy punishment he had taken. It was his marvelous ability to assimilate a beating and stay that had won him his

title. Sometimes, not very often, but almost always unexpectedly, he won a fight. It was these surprizing, occasional victories, attributed by followers of the sport to sheer durability, that kept him in the game and among the top-notchers. They did not know the real reason for Nelson's victories. They did not know that underneath the wide-eyed, wide-mouthed grin Nelson wore as his fighting face lay a mighty spirit that could only occasionally be roused. He was slow to wrath, cold in his rage, as a Norseman is. But when his wrath was roused by a foul blow that the referee did not catch, or a frame-up of which Nelson did not know when he entered the ring, then he won his fight. He could not be beaten.

But in the last few months of his career in the ring the Dane lost all his fights. He was matched with some top-notchers, but that was only to give the top-notchers a chance to make an easy showing before a small-town audience against an opponent whose title still stood for something—and who could take a beating.

Then came the last fight. The invisible fourth man in the ring stepped in. Nelson knew he was framed from the start. He felt the presence of that invisible referee. His wrath was great, but he could not win. He had been shadow-boxing for weeks, sparring hopelessly, with a protégé of Father Time, a hacking cough. It left him weak and legless after a fast, six-round go.

Yes, The Durable Dane had descended at last to the six-round class. He was only a semi-final fighter, taking punishment from second-raters, young comers who were two or three years his junior, mere youths of twenty to twenty-four, some of them even younger.

It so happened that the last fight for The Durable Dane took place in Swango Falls, the paper-making town where the employes of the mills made up a goodly share of the audiences at the bi-monthly smokers of the Falls Athletic Club. And it was Jim Dandy from Kenosha, who put Nelson away. Jim Dandy, a rank second-rater, just out of the preliminary class, put The Durable Dane down and out!

Nelson took the full count of ten for the first time—stayed down. When they picked him up and dragged him to his corner in the fifth round a crimson froth oozed from his lips.

An hour later, in the dressing-room, the club physician told the Dane the story.

He was through. He was so close to being a "lunger" that there were no two ways about it. He must quit the game. That was the answer to the hacking cough.

Fortunately it cost Nelson nothing for the diagnosis and prescription. The doctor was paid by the club and this free medical advice left Nelson with fifteen dollars in cash. That was his share of the gate receipts as the loser in the semi-windup.

Nelson sought a boarding-house in the Flats because it would be cheap. He was surprized to find one run by a woman of his own race, a clean, home-like place where it cost only ten dollars a week for room and board. He engaged a room and paid for it a week in advance, then he settled down for a rest. He took his medicine—not from a bottle but out of the physician's mouth—like a man, a fighter. And he made up his mind to get well.

NELSON was only twenty-six, a mere youth in years hough a veteran in the ring. Except for his lungs and his face he was sound.

At the end of a week, with only half a week's board money left, Nelson got a job in the sulfite-mill. It was not exactly the place the club doctor would have recommended as a sanitarium for an incipient case of "T. B." but Nels had to have some sort of work, and he was too weak in the knees from the shadow-boxing he had done to take a man's job. He took one usually filled by a boy. He became a screen-box beater.

Nelson's cough still racked him and left him legless, so legless that he had to sit down quite often on the edge of the box and wait for his wind.

His work was easy. It consisted in wielding a broad piece of belting like a flail on the copper-screened bottom of the screen-box. Liquid wood-pulp from the digesters ran into the box and it was Nelson's job to keep the screen from clogging. When he could not longer beat the fibres through he swept them up and carried them in a bucket to be put through the digester again.

It was not much of a job but it paid him enough for him to board at Christianson's and live—and fight that cough. He was a fighter by instinct and profession and he never knew when he was licked, and he

fought hard. He slept with his windows wide open, swathed in all his bed-clothing and most of his own clothing, until Gloria Christianson, who helped her mother after she got through with her own job at the paper-mill, discovered Nelson's predilection for fresh air and, suspecting why, provided him with an extra heavy pair of blankets.

This little act of thoughtfulness gave Nelson, for the first time in his life, a totally different conception of women from the one inculcated in him by his manager. Apparently, here was one woman who did not mean the same thing they said. She was trying to help him to fight. He was terribly, dumbly grateful.

It was in the early Fall that Nelson quit the ring and went to work in the mill. A month later the club doctor, happening to run across Nelson, eyed him curiously and asked him where he was working. Nelson told him.

The doctor swore.

"You might as well commit suicide," he said. "You get out of there. Those sulfuric acid fumes will eat your lungs right out. Why don't you get a job in the woods for the Winter?"

Nelson shook his head.

"No strength," he said. "I couldn't handle a peavey—couldn't even roll a log."

But, since the doctor told him to, Nelson managed. He got a job as cookee in a logging-crew. He earned his grub and a little money, slept in a tent, took long walks before sunrise, and came back to town in the Spring, swinging a peavey on the drive. He left his cough up in the woods.

The first thing Nelson did was to hunt up the doctor and proffer the physician all the money he had earned in the woods.

The doctor, who was something of a sport, swore generous oaths, thumped Nelson on the chest and told him where he could go.

"But you keep to —— out of the ring!" the doctor added.

Nels grinned some more and nodded. Then he went back to Christianson's boarding-house with the money the doctor had refused and got his old room. He was going to keep out of the ring.

STARKS, the Swede, was still star-boarder—that is, he ate the most—at Mrs. Christianson's. He revived the alleged joke about "On'durable Dane" and got some more laughter out of it. But Gloria Christianson again only smiled. Nelson noticed it. So did Starks. The Swede gave Nelson an ugly look. The Dane grinned.

Starks was boss-barker at the pulp-mill and bully of the barker crew, quite the roughest, toughest set of men in the mill. Nelson got a job as a barker, a man's job. He became one of the Swede's crew.

Gloria walked down to the pulp-mill with Nelson, on the way to her own work across the river at the paper-mill, the morning he started on his new job. She asked him this question—

"Now that you're well, when are you going back into the ring?"

"What makes you think I'm going back in the ring?" queried Nels.

Gloria Christianson flung up her head. She had been quietly resentful of Nelson's good-humored silence under the clumsy banter of Starks, the Swede bully. She was golden-haired, with a bare touch of titian hue in the gold, and her eyes were a very dark blue. Sometimes they seemed to turn purple when she was excited or roused in any way.

They looked purple now, Nelson noticed, as she stopped and faced him. Her red lips curled over her white teeth in a challenging pout, as she retorted—

"I didn't think you were the kind of a man who'd quit because he got licked once."

Nelson didn't know how to answer her. He felt that it was unjust but, because she said it, he blushed and his tongue stuck in his mouth. He knew,well enough, that it was no licking by a second-rater that had driven him from the ring. But The Durable Dane had never been a hand at offering alibis. He answered her, at length, quite simply and truthfully.

"I got knocked out, and out I stay," he said. "I'll never fight again."

Gloria Christianson, looking into Nelson's frank blue eyes, knew that he spoke the truth. But she misunderstood the meaning of his reply. She repeated it to another girl, her chum. In the course of time it got around, much garbled, that the once Durable Dane was a quitter—that he was afraid to fight.

Nelson went to work on the barker-machine platform, holding sections of hemlock against a rapidly rotating steel disk, studded with sharp knives, that strips the

bark off and leaves the timber smooth and naked. That is a man's job. Nelson felt more at home there than he had in the beater-room. For one thing he wore gloves. They were some different from the kind he was used to wearing. They were padded in the palms instead of on the backs, lined with stiff leather set with tiny steel brads, something like the armor of a corn-husking glove. The gloves were to protect the hands of the barker from the rough-ridged coating and sharp splinters of the hemlock hunks they handled, and to give them a sure grip on the slippery stuff.

Nels was a fighter still, and he fought his machine, his hands clad in the stiff gloves, his feet encased in the calked boots he had worn on the drive, his woolen shirt-sleeves chopped off at the elbow, his stagged trousers held up by a narrow strap.

The girls from the paper-mill who trooped through each day at fifteen minutes before twelve, released a quarter of an hour earlier than the pulp-mill men to avoid the crush and jam and annoyance that would come if they left at the same time, used to loiter at the barker-room door and watch Nels Nelson at work. They gave little admiring gasps at the play of muscles in his forearms as he lifted blocks of hemlock from the belt that brought them to his side and held them against the revolving disk.

He was something of a study in the beauty of strength, was Nelson, the battered prize-fighter. He was no beauty as to face, that was sure.

The marks of conflict, however, gave Nelson a sort of standing among the rough barker-crew, even with Sven Starks, the Swede bully. Starks ventured oral jokes on Nels at the dining-room table at Christianson's but for some reason he let him alone at the mill.

Starks had an odd idea, a delusion, that he was a humorist. His favorite manner of cracking a joke was to walk up behind a man at his work, welt him a whack on the back with a hand as wide as a frying-pan and as heavy as a flat-iron, and yell in his ear—

"Hey!"

Invariably the victim jumped and dropped whatever he was holding and yelled. That would set the Swede off into loud guffaws, and the rest of the men laughed, too. It was better to laugh than not. The Swede had a reputation as a pretty bad man in a fight. It was said he had once strangled a man to death with one hand, the other being useless from a broken bone.

So far Nelson had escaped the Swede's biggest joke. Perhaps it was because of the almost superstitious fear that the average man, no matter how big and powerful he is, has for the prize-fighter. It is the fear of the unknown, awe of the science of pugilism which is, after all, only a man's natural ability to scrap developed to the *n*th power. Whatever it was that kept the Swede's hands off Nelson, it was effective—until it came to his ears that Nelson was afraid to go back in the ring because he had been knocked out once.

That was the way Gloria's repetition of Nelson's reply to her question was garbled at last.

Starks waited his best opportunity to spring his big joke on Nelson. That came, one noon, when Gloria Christianson was standing in the door of the barker-room, watching Nelson at work. Starks saw her and, unnoticed by her, he ambled carelessly along the row of barkers and, when he came up behind Nelson, he leaped out, clapped him on the back and shouted—

"Hey!"

The joke brought its usual result—at first. Nelson dropped the section of hemlock he was lifting from the belt and, with the training of five years, leaped aside and crouched in fighting posture.

The joke would have been splendid, except for an unforseen accident. The heavy piece of hemlock rolled against the barker-disk, was clipped by the knives and sent skidding off the steel shelf on to Starks' toes. Its edge landed on his rubber and half-smashed his little toe on the oak floor.

Starks yelled as the pain stabbed him but because Gloria was looking, he clamped his teeth and bottled up his fury.

Gloria laughed. She couldn't help it. That was her idea of a good joke—one that reacted on the joker The Swede grinned at her, very red in the face. Then he turned white and stared fixedly at her. She returned his stare for a moment then slowly her face paled under his gaze. What it was that she saw in the Swede's little, red-rimmed eyes no one else could tell. It was something that frightened her into silence. She went away swiftly, hurried on home to help her mother set the table for dinner.

When Gloria had gone Starks turned to

Nelson and swore at him for a clumsy fool. He called him once more "On'durable Dane" and many other things. Nelson only grinned. He wanted to laugh but his bewildered resentment at the Swede's ugly look at Gloria prevented that. He was not the slightest bit afraid of Sven Starks. His recoil from the sudden blow on his back was as natural as the winking of an eye. But Starks, in the light of the garbled report of Nelson's reason for not returning to the ring, interpreted that, and Nelson's grin, as timidity.

He would probably have picked a fight with Nels, then and there, but for his injured toe. The whistle blew at that moment, too, and the barker-room became a passageway for hundreds of men going to dinner. Starks hobbled to a water-faucet behind the door, removed his sock and rubber, and bathed his toe. Nelson sat down beside his barker-machine and ate his dinner from a pail. He saved money that way. Nelson did not intend always to remain a barker.

Because of his toe and his limp, and Gloria's laughter, Sven Starks did not go to the boarding-house for dinner, either. Avoiding Nelson, he crouched behind the door and waited for Gloria to return. When she came along he reached out a huge hand, caught her by the arm and drew her down beside him, struggling, crying out in a muffled voice.

"You laff on me!" said Starks, with a cruel light in his eyes. "Aye mak' you sorry, by ——! Look! Look w'ere aye hurted my fute! Look at de blood. Ha'int you sorry, hey?"

He thrust his big, dirty foot up and tried to force her to regard his crushed toe. It was his elemental manner of salving his wounded pride. Unconsciously, in her laughter, Gloria had pricked the Swede in his tenderest spot. He simply could not bear a joke on himself.

Gloria's half-whispered protest grew to a frightened, sharp scream of desperate disgust. Nelson heard it and leaped to his feet and ran to the door.

When he saw the Swede with his huge arm around Gloria he did the one thing there was to do. He rocked Starks' head on his shoulders with a swift, short-arm jab to the jaw. The Swede retained his grasp on Gloria and Nelson struck out again. The second blow was harder than the first and Starks let go of the girl. She staggered back, flung herself against Nelson and clung to him a moment, trembling violently.

"There, don't you be afraid of him," said Nels.

"Afraid! I ain't afraid!" cried the girl. "He makes me sick!"

But into her eyes there crept a look that set every drop of blood in the Dane's body tingling. She was afraid—for him! For an instant they stared into each other's eyes. Nelson gave her back for that look of hers, something that caused her to catch her breath, something that blotted out everything else, for a moment, in a shining white light. Then with a warning bellow the Swede charged on Nelson.

STARKS had taken time to replace his sock and rubber on his hurt foot, and likewise he had drawn on his hands a pair of the leather-palmed, brad-studded gloves, the steel brads worn sharp and smooth.

Gloria thrust herself between Nelson and Starks, but the Dane, with a gentle but tremendously powerful sweep of his left arm, pushed her back of him and stepped forward to meet the Swede's attack.

Nelson stood a foot higher than the Swede, on the edge of the barker-machine platform, but even then his eyes were just on a level with the little pig-eyes of the giant boss barker. Starks must have weighed all of fifty pounds more than Nelson. And Nelson was well up in the heavyweight class when he quit the ring.

Nelson waited for the Swede to come on, possessed of a calm, icy fury toward the big fellow, a fury that had been roused at the sight of Starks' disgusting attempt to force Gloria to view his smashed toe, a fury, disgust, resentment, whatever it might have been, that had something in it of an age-old racial antagonism. It was Dane against Swede, as it had often been through centuries of warfare.

Gloria Christianson was the only other person in that part of the mill at that moment, but others were approaching through the mill-yard. One lone barker, snoring unseen behind his machine, was in the barker-room. The Swede mumbled out a mouthful of virulent profanity as he advanced.

Nelson, at the edge of the platform, shifted his feet, instinctively seeking a good footing, and he discovered something that

made him back away. His calked boots slipped on the smooth, slippery oak planks. And the Swede wore rubbers!

Starks lunged up on to the platform, his face contorted with rage, his hands outstretched in their mailed gloves like steel talons, seeking for Nelson's windpipe. Nels shifted and backed further away, feeling for some spot where his feet would not slip. And he tried to draw Starks away from where Gloria stood. The girl would not stay at a really safe distance; she kept creeping closer, her eyes on Nelson's face.

Nelson retreated but he did it cannily, crouching in his characteristic attitude, his back bent in a bow, his left hand thrust out with his elbow set almost against the ridge of his hip, his right farther back, the elbow crooked on a level with his belt. His arms were like pistons, ready to move forth and back in well-greased grooves.

Many a fighter to his sorrow had mistaken that peculiar crouch of the Dane for nervous timidity. It was not strange that Starks should believe Nelson was trying to get away from him. He did not dream that Nelson was never more anxious for a fight than now.

The Swede wanted to fight, but in his own peculiar way. He was not going to use his fists at all. He only wanted to get a clutch on Nelson's throat with his steel-shod gloves. They would prick through the skin and gouge and tear and kill.

Nelson rushed in suddenly, tapped Starks on the stomach and leaped away. The Swede grunted and swept a long arm at Nelson, clawing at his arm but no more than touching it. He roared out more indecency.

Nelson shot a swift backward glance down the barker-room. Fifteen feet away was the door to the beater-room, a wide, sliding door, left open at all times except in Winter. Gloria Christianson caught Nelson's quick glance. She gasped and nodded.

The snoring barker, roused from slumber by the Swede's roars, cried out hoarsely:

"Look out for him, Dane! If he gets those claws on ye he'll kill ye sure!"

Nelson did not intend that Starks should get his claws on him. But he realized that if he were going to fight as the Swede intended to fight he would be licked. And if he were going to keep away from him he must throw away his peculiar advantage—his boring-in method of attack, his in-fighting that was his best asset—for he was short of reach with most of his opponents. With the Swede he was absurdly out-reached.

The Swede had another advantage—his mailed hands and his rubbers. Nelson determined to even things up a bit before he did any fighting.

He would lead the Swede to the beater-room. Its floor was as slippery as wet soap—but it was of pine, permeated with pulp, and offered a soft, springy resistance to his calked boots. The dull calks would stick and hold, and Starks wore rubbers!

Feinting and dodging, leaping backward and darting forward, but each time retreating a little farther, Nelson came to the edge of the platform where one step down led through the beater-room entrance. The Swede, his face settling into a sneering grin at Nelson's tactics, set himself for a rush. Nelson knew it because he had his eyes on Starks' feet.

Nels whipped another swift glance behind, then he leaped back and down the step, clean through the door. He landed on his toes and his calks held.

Gloria, intent on Nelson, came so near to Starks, as the Swede lurched after his man, that his shoulder brushed hers. She did not recoil, this time; she flashed a scowl at him, slapped at her shoulder with one hand as if to brush off his contaminating touch, darted through the door after him, slammed it shut and locked it.

Gloria had shut off the arena for the combat. She thrust a wooden pin in the latch, twisted a rope around it, tested it and found it secure.

Then she faced toward the combatants, glorious as her name, her eyes a deep purple, her lips parted over flashing teeth, her golden hair flying in wonderful confusion about a face flushed with excitement. She was apparently as eager for the clash as any ringside fanatic at a championship bout.

"Now!" she cried out. "Now you go get him, Nels!"

Nelson flashed her a grin. It was not a pretty smile, that battered, twisted, fighting grin of his, but there was a light in his blue eyes that leaped to Gloria's and told her he had heard and that he was encouraged, stimulated.

A moment later, as if it were an afterthought, Nelson spoke.

"I'll get him. You just watch!"

NELSON was keeping well up on his toes, where his calks formed half-moons in the soles of his boots. He squirmed the metal nails into the water-soaked floor with a grip that could not slip, setting himself for the Swede's next rush.

Starks strode at him, bellowing and clawing. His right hand grazed the Dane's shoulder as Nels stepped swiftly aside, half-pivoting on his toe, dodging like a matador from the rush of a bull. The Swede slid past. Nelson shot out his right and jolted a straight jab to the jaw. It upset the Swede, his feet insecure on the slimy floor. He sprawled out on his left side.

Nelson stood and waited for him to rise. When Starks got on his feet he was like a man frenzied. He launched himself recklessly, a mountain of furious flesh, at Nelson.

But Nelson was not there. He danced aside, again on his toes and sent out another hard-knuckled jab to the jaw.

The jolt rocked Starks against a beater-tank. It saved him another fall.

He caught hold of the tank with one hand, his steel-studded glove clicking against an iron hoop, set his foot against the base of the tank and hurled himself back at Nelson.

The Durable Dane had seen this trick before, a rush from the ropes by a fighter who seeks to add to his own weight the elastic spring of stretched cordage. He grinned as the huge hulk of the Swede came toward him and, instead of dodging, this time he set himself, his right knee bent, his right toe gripping the floor, his left ahead, and his left arm straight out, low, almost its whole length. The fist buried itself in Starks' stomach.

It looked like a simple straight-arm, but there was a kick to it. Nelson had used it many a time. There was a little, final downward forearm thrust, almost a twist of the wrist. And it met the Swede's rush midway.

The Swede's grunting roar sounded not unlike the crunch of a barker-machine, biting into the bark of the hemlock. But his clawing, steel-clad fingers closed on Nelson's left arm. Nelson tore the arm loose at the expense of ripped skin that spurted blood and dyed his flesh a bright crimson. The Swede lurched forward, slipped and went to his knees.

Nelson rose from his crouch and with him his left fist shot up under Starks' chin, an upper-cut to the jaw. Again the big fellow groaned; his head rocked back so far that his little eyes rolled down and their whites showed.

Nelson stood back and waited for the Swede to get up. Never in his life had he felt so sure of winning his fight as he did at this moment. It was a cold, calculating certitude that came to him as the gift of his Norse ancestry. He had crowded the first, fierce, icy rage that possessed him into a scientific aggressiveness. His training had been thorough.

He changed his fight now from defense to offense. He got ready for that boring, short-arm, ripping, slashing attack that had won him all the victories he ever had and saved him from being knocked out at other times. It was an offense that looked like defense because he let the other man rush—and get away. But between the first rush and the getaway something happened. It happened now, as Starks rose and, sweeping out his long arms, open-handed, fingers hooked, feet spread wide apart, swept down on the Dane as if he would crush him, fall upon him and tear him limb from limb.

Nelson feinted a savage smash to the face—held his punch and, as Starks threw up one hand clumsily to ward off the blow, Nels jammed a right jab to the solar. Starks doubled over the blow and again his feet slipped from under him. But his left hand closed on Nelson's right arm with a clutch like a vise. Nelson could not tear it loose. He could feel the steel brads sinking deep in his flesh. He stopped pulling for fear he would rip his own muscle. But he sent home one, two, three more stomach punches—swift, short, upward jabs that bowed his back and made the Swede double up still more.

Starks' breath came from him in gasping, roaring groans, but despite that he held on, swept his right hand up and got it on Nelson's neck, his thumb pressing on his throat.

It was the grip he wanted, the grip Nelson feared. But the Dane only grinned as he felt the cold metal points bruise his neck. He twisted his head, ducked and strained until the pressure of the huge thumb slipped from his wind a bit. Meanwhile he continued, almost automatically, his left-handed tattoo on Starks' stomach.

Starks released his hold on Nelson's right arm just a fraction of a second, trying to get a better hold, and Nelson ripped his arm

clear. His sleeve was torn to ribbons and his flesh gouged again. But the arm was no longer held useless. He could reach Starks' chin, and now he alternated a left to the stomach with a right to the jaw.

The Swede, his head rocked back at every blow from Nelson's right, his stomach pounded so that his breathing was agony, held on to the Dane's throat as if his hand were clamped, and groped with his right to join it with the other on Nelson's wind-pipe.

Nelson threw himself backward, dragging the Swede with him. Starks' knees touched the floor. His weight pulled on Nelson's back terrifically. Nelson managed to get a gasp of breath; but there was something else he must watch out for besides his wind. He must keep on his feet. If he went down——

"Step on his foot!"

Gloria's voice was at Nelson's ear, so close he could feel her breath on his cheek. But, for all that, it seemed to come from far away, as if through a muffled tube. He was that far gone without realizing it. A man must breathe. The admonition brought a surge of renewed strength to him from somewhere. He lurched to one side and, lifting his right foot, brought it down, steel-shod, on the rubber-covered foot that lay sprawled on its side on the floor.

The half-shriek of agony that this brought was sweet music to his ears and he used his foot again. This time, apparently, he struck the mashed toe, the Swede's sorest spot. The grip on Nelson's throat relaxed —just a trifle, but enough. He tore loose, whirled himself clear around and, again at the expense of long, raking furrows in his flesh, he got free.

His head was swimming as he faced Starks again but a few long breaths through the nose remedied that. He caught sight of Gloria on the step at the door. She was holding in place the wooden pin that locked it. Behind her the door trembled and shook from blows outside. Her face was ablaze with a light that cleared up the last bit of fog in Nelson's brain. He dodged the Swede's rush easily, swung around so that the next lunge was stopped half-way by a terrific swing to the Swede's face.

Then, following that blow, Nelson rushed. It was a peculiar side-stepping attack. His left jabbed out in swift, short strokes, his fist curving down from the wrist in bruising, tearing slashes that broke flesh every time. With gloves on this twisting blow was bad enough. With bare knuckles it was terrible. The skin about the Swede's right eye was ripped open and blood streamed into the eye. He was blinded with gore.

But still Starks clawed and groped and clutched; still he muttered and mumbled and roared his obscene, murderous purpose.

The Durable Dane realized that he had met a man who was going to be able to take more punishment before he caved in than he, himself, had ever taken when he was at the top of his career as a punishment-eater. So he used his right in long, swinging strokes, clear from the shoulder. There was no need to guard against the Swede, except to keep out of range of those steel-sheathed talons.

Rush and jab and leap back! Side-step and swing! Rush and swing!

Again and again Nelson repeated this battering attack. But the Swede still managed to keep on his feet most of the time, and still he made mad rushes and lunges, his head twisted on one side so that he could see out of his one good eye, and out of that eye blazed an unconquerable lust to kill that could not be dimmed while consciousness lasted.

Oh, Starks would fight—if that was what it could be called. He would stay until he was knocked cold.

Nelson wondered just where he must land to hand Starks the knockout punch. He had already handed him several that would put out almost any heavyweight, yet the Swede did not fall.

Again Gloria's voice came to him.

"Keep at him, Nels. He's going. He's almost gone," she was saying, her tones rippling with a strange, tingling delight. "One minute more and he'll be gone. See! He can't get his left arm up any more!"

Nelson looked. He had been paying strict attention to Starks' right eye—battering it more surely shut—and he had not noted, as Gloria had, that the Swede was scarcely using his left hand at all. His arm hung in an awkward position at his side. Something had happened to it; perhaps he had dislocated the shoulder in one of his crashing, slipping, sprawling tumbles on the slimy floor.

Nelson danced around the Swede and whipped a blow to that shoulder. Ah, there it was! The Swede winced and drew back clumsily. One of his feet slipped and

he went on the knee. Quick as a flash Nelson launched his body in air, his left arm out straight as a crow-bar and just as rigid. His right fist followed it with a ripping upper-cut.

The left got Starks under the ear. The right struck his chin squarely on the point. He reeled up on both feet, toppled back, tottered, slid. Then Nelson rushed him recklessly. He bent his head, bowed his shoulders, concentrated both fists on Starks' stomach, bored in, hammered home a terrific, rapid succession of short-arm jabs to the solar plexus—and the Swede, swaying like a tree that has been cut clean at the base with a sharp saw, went crashing down and lay motionless on the floor.

NELS NELSON stared across the form of the prostrate giant at Gloria Christianson and grinned.

"I got him," he said.

Behind Gloria the door was bulging, threatening to crack beneath the blows that were being rained upon it. For the first time Nelson heard them. The noise sounded like wood striking wood.

"Better open the door, Gloria," he said.

Meekly Gloria obeyed, drawing the pin out with difficulty and standing aside. The door screeched along its grooves as it was shot back by vigorous arms and a half-dozen barkers bulged through, stumbled down the steps, then stopped in blank amaze at the picture that greeted them.

One of the barkers, he who had snored and awakened with a warning to Nelson, held part of a log in his arms. He had been using it as a battering-ram on the door. He stared at Nelson, then he dropped his gaze, his mouth opening as he did so, on the beaten hulk of the barker-room bully.

"Well!" he said. "I'm a ——"

His words were blotted out in the thud of the hemlock log that he dropped to the floor.

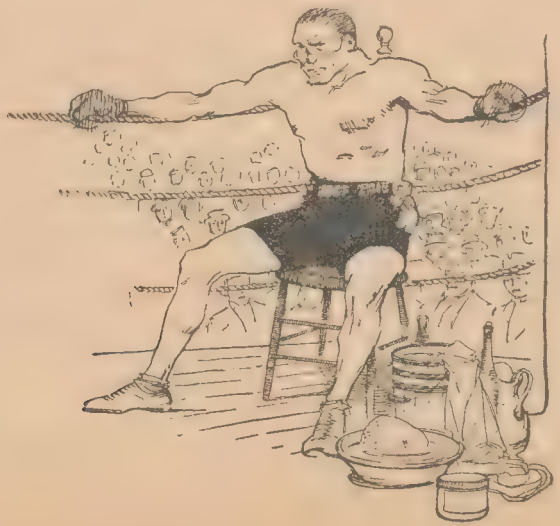
Gloria Christianson helped Nels Nelson wash the blood from his arms and chest at the faucet behind the barker-room door. She used her apron that she wore at her work in the paper-mill.

"I thought you didn't like the sight of blood," grinned Nels as she swabbed away the gore from his arms.

Gloria shivered; but it was not at the sight of Nelson's blood; it was at the memory of the Swede's smashed toe.

"His foot was dirty," she said with a laugh that had a quick little catch in it, and she curled her under lip beneath her teeth. "You—you're clean, Nels," she added.

But still she tenderly wiped the long scratches on his arms, where the steel brads of Starks' gloves had ripped and torn. Her eyes were a soft, almost brownish purple, as she met the blue-eyed gaze of Nels Nelson. She did not see his battered nose, his bruised ear. She saw a dimple in his chin, a mouth that curved upward in a smile, not a grin, and a light in the eyes that transformed "The On'durable Dane" into something quite endurable—quite.



A Face To Tie To

By George M. A. Cain

NO DOUBT you're perfectly right if you feel that a man like me is beneath any capacity for thinking about the big things—things like men's souls and God and what is coming after we've finished our stretch in this world and what it's all really for.

One of the biggest criminologists in this country said I was a perfect criminal type. He was not far wrong, if he meant that I'm a bad man. Most men in prison like me will tell you they're here by mistake, or were railroaded in as scapegoats, or were driven to their crime by the rank injustice of others worse than themselves.

Probably I'd tell you the same thing if I didn't know you could look up my record and find I'm here on my own confession. I might as well tell the truth, which is that I'd be getting no more than I deserve if they added another fifteen years to the stretch I'm serving.

And the records show that it's my own fault. My father was a good man—a country doctor who went to church on Sunday and lived up to it all week. My mother was a fit wife for such a man. They pinched themselves of everything to waste an education on me. I paid them back by breaking their hearts.

Bad right through—I got tired long ago of kidding myself with excuses. Going to Sunday-school and behaving myself decently just didn't appeal to me. So I played hookey of Sabbath afternoons and used my church pennies and any others I could find about the house to join in the crap games the tough children played up in the miner's little settlement on Iron Hill.

But that kid gambling didn't start me down grade. I went in for the gambling because I thought it was wrong. I went out of my way to pick those boys to play with because I believed they were bad. They couldn't have led me astray. I got a gang of them into the House of Correction when I was sixteen, and my father barely saved their ring-leader when he went a year's income into debt to keep me from going with them.

I got my first sentence at twenty. This is my fifth. Clever lawyers cheated justice or I'd be serving two others instead of it.

And yet —I have my beliefs. Not much of what you'd call theology. You see, I didn't even take in the hour a week of Sunday-school when I could escape it. What I believe about God is mostly what I've learned about men. Maybe it will sound funny for me to try to say I'd rather give up the hope of ever getting out of here than give up these beliefs.

And the main thing I believe and want to keep on believing is that some men

and the Great Power that made them are straight. Most crooks think all other men are crooked. Well, I know better. I know there are men you could tie to and not find yourself hung on a double-cross. You can see it on their faces—the straight type carved out by straight living and lit up by the glow of a straight soul behind it all. It shows, just like I show what I am. And clean men—and kind men—I've seen them and I know.

And that's what keeps me believing that the Big Man up above is the cleanest and straightest and kindest of them all. And it keeps me hoping that in the end He'll stand by me a little straighter than I ever tried to stand but once. Which helps in here.

Anyhow it makes this stretch different from others to know I'm here this time because I played straight once myself. And I might have been here just the same, but with everything as crooked as the rest of my life. It's better this way—for the feelings.

For my trial came near to putting the skids under everything I ever kept to pin a hope on. It was my lawyer who set me all guessing about those big things for a while. He had the finest, straightest face I'd seen since my father's grew hazy in my memory. But I reckon I'll have to tell just how it happened.

YOU see, they were away off on their dope about this murder. They had me wrong—or the case all wrong against me. It wasn't my revolver that they found in old Scrooks's hand, with two bullets gone, and both the marks on him showing he couldn't possibly have done it himself. If they had but known it, I got rid of my gat after they took me, and I could probably find it now in an hour's search of the swamp we passed.

And the job wasn't done at ten o'clock, as they said it was. The old miser was working over his crooked ledgers at a quarter of eleven. I had been watching him at it through a crack in his solid window-shutter for an hour.

But my best chance lay in the fact that the bloody thumb-print wasn't mine. The jobs I did in those days were crude enough. Booze and coke had got me careless and thick in the nerves. But I had too much sense to tackle anything without wearing gloves about it.

Of course I'd come to rob him. I'd come armed and wasn't taking chances with the concealed-weapon laws just for the fun of it. Of course I'd gone to the house a few minutes before ten—as the man testified who met me on the road, carrying an acetylene bicycle lamp in his hand. Of course I'd left the prints in the soft mud, with a little hole in my sole that had broken through that very day without my knowing it. And, as luck would have it, the cheap little thirty-two pistol I'd bought at a pawnshop that very morning was of exactly the same cheap make and style as the one found on the body, though I didn't know that at first. And of course there was my record, sufficient to damn me if I'd proved I was a hundred miles away.

But all I had done between ten and eleven o'clock was to stand and peep occasionally through the crack in the blind and wonder whether I'd better take the chance after having been so badly lamped just below the place.

At eleven I had heard some one coming into the yard from the front gate, and had slipped away. I had gone to the little hotel and been seen by plenty of people at the bar. That was why they had decided the thing was done before eleven, I guess. The hotel bunch knew I'd gone to bed around midnight and had seen me come out of my room in the morning.

I was in bad and I knew it. But there were those holes in their case against me. I had seen a good, clever lawyer pull a man through smaller holes than those.

If I could but get the lawyer! That was where I was in bad.

THE morning after they took me, when I went before the court for the hearing, I had lain without a blink of sleep; and those two words, "In bad," had been sinking in deeper and deeper every minute of that wretched first night in the cell of a country court-house jail. I couldn't get the lawyer I needed.

Oh, sure—there are organizations of yeggs, and I had belonged to them before the last two year stretch. But I had turned State's evidence in that case, when I found I couldn't get off, and the gang was more likely to send a gunman after me than a good lawyer. You know the kind I mean—that can make an honest witness sound like a wholesale liar and trick the

jury into the notion that the judge is part of a conspiracy to send a client up without rhyme or reason. I needed that kind. I couldn't get one. That kind isn't hanging around a court waiting for a judge to request him to defend a penniless criminal.

I get sick now when I think of that room jammed with people—all sorts of people—good people and bad people, straight people and people almost as crooked as I, people with no business there and people with the job of getting a rope around my neck, and all of them against me and looking at me like a curious sort of wild beast who must be exterminated, eager to see it done to me, and some of them sure they had the goods to get it done. And I was surest of all of them—because I hadn't a lawyer.

I hadn't a friend in the world. The whole world was my enemy. I'd always been a rat. I did not mind being a rat. I'd been a rat in a hole before. Now I was a rat in a hole with its jaw broken.

I deserved it? Did it ever make trouble any softer for you to know you had nobody but yourself to blame for it?

They stood me up before the judge. These eyes of mine were still boring, boring into that crowd, with the same thing behind them that's behind the eyes of every trapped rat—the crazy hope for a hole to crawl through when you know there isn't any hole, the feel that things can't be as bad as they are just because you can't bear having them that bad.

And then I saw the face of a man. I'm not apt to forget that face ever. If I'd never seen it again I'd remember it yet just as well as I do remember it.

There had been a little hitch. A group of men who had some business with the judge had been delayed, and they had rushed in just after the clerk had called my name and got me up with the constable who had me in charge. Whatever their business was it was important enough so that the judge stopped proceedings for a couple of minutes to glance over some papers, ask a question or two and sign his name.

My man was in that group.

My man! I knew I had to have him, from the first glimpse of his face.

No, I couldn't describe that face, and it wouldn't help you if I did. My official measurements are five feet, eight and three quarters. I've been described as a short man of hardly over five feet, and a tall one well over six, and got pinched on the descriptions—and my record. They've said my jaw was massive and they've said my chin is weak. They've painted my eyes gray, green, blue and black; and my hair black, yellow, red and gray. They've even missed that scar on my cheek.

Most of these character measurement rules about faces strikes me as pure bunk. Lucifer's face dimensions fit the devil's perfectly, of course; but Lucifer never looked like the devil until he was the devil. Not all bulls have flat feet, and not all flat feet are on bulls. There are bulls with big chins and with little chins, long noses and snub noses, straight eyebrows and arched ones and broad ones and narrow. There are fat, moonfaced bulls and skinny ones with hawk-beaks to them. And I know a bull as far as I can see him. And the —— bull knows me, where he never got within a thousand miles of my picture. I never run into one but he gives me a second look.

Why? I don't know why. I know infernally well it's so.

And I knew I wanted that man for my lawyer in the tightest hole I'd ever got into. I knew he was right. I knew he would fight like a bull-dog for a client. And then—there was something a little more in his eyes and the wrinkles around them. He would have a heart for a rat in a hole.

He certainly wasn't handsome. With a different soul behind it and a bigger body under it, the movies might have used his face for a pug-ugly type of villain. With the man he was behind the features, they couldn't ever have used him at all. I know now that there were some good people of one kind who didn't think he was any saint; though I never heard that any one failed to respect him. He was my kind of a saint. He'd fought hard for what he was and had. He'd fought hard, but fought clean, and hadn't gone sour in the fighting. He was good enough for me any day.

I suppose the judge told them who I was. They all took the kind of look at me the Rubes give the ten-cent wild man of Borneo who's eaten ten men before they caught him for the sideshow. Maybe I was seeing too much; but it seemed to me that *he* looked as if he felt sorry for me. They stayed up by the low platform while

the judge went through the delayed opening ceremonies of the hearing.

"Has the prisoner counsel?" was about the first question raised.

I shook my head. The prisoner hadn't counsel or money. It was up to the court to appoint. The judge looked about the room an instant.

Evidently it wasn't occurring to him to appoint my man. He would pick one of the young lawyers who might care more for the State-paid fee than to keep out of an inglorious contest with a foregone conclusion.

It wasn't me—I knew better than to do it—it was the sheer desperation of my desire that cried out inside me:

"I want *him!* Oh, judge—I want *him!* I ——"

The fierce bang of the judge's gavel called me to order—and a look that fitted the bang. Of course the look was largely professional. His Honor turned it into a covert grin as he shifted his gaze for a moment at my choice of counsel, to enliven proceedings with about the average of magisterial humor.

"Governor, here's opportunity for you. May I offer you the honor of ——"

"Yes, your Honor, I'll take his case," my man uttered crisply.

St. Peter will never surprize or delight me more, should he open the gates of paradise for me. But even my surprize was hardly equal to that of the judge, of every one around him, of all the motley assembly in the room.

"You—you mean—" the court gasped.

"Yes,—I'll take him," repeated the governor.

I went dizzy with relief and had to clutch the rail for support. I felt as if I had already won my liberty. There was something more to the feeling. I had some one on my side—some one worth the whole lot who were against me. Yes, I was banking pretty heavily on a face. Maybe I've just been lucky in my guesses; but I've seldom gone wrong on a face that I've once felt sure I'd placed. And I'd never been so sure of any other face as I was of his.

I was so sure that I spilled a lot more to him than I would have told to any other lawyer. I admitted that I'd come to the State and the little burg on a tip from an old pal about this hermit miser. I admitted that I'd come heeled with a gun. But I told him I had got cold feet after meeting the man with the bicycle lamp and just hung around until eleven. And I told him that old Scrooks was alive at that time. I had heard steps and run—and there were plenty of witnesses to prove I was back at the little roadhouse by ten minutes after eleven.

"Well, old man," he told me when I was through, "I guess you've told me too much not to be telling the truth. I don't think you killed Scrooks. I'll see you through."

God! I could have knelt and kissed his feet. He had told me he was no longer the governor of the State; but he was big enough to have been the governor, lawyer enough to have given up such office because he needed and could make more money at his practice than the governor's salary. And he was going to give a rat like me his valuable time and energy.

He was going to save me. I didn't doubt it for a moment. I quit worrying over everything but the booze and coke I couldn't get. And somehow I didn't miss those as much as I had other times when I had been too new in a jail to know who had the stuff or, as now, too broke to buy it. I felt as if that man had taken my load off my shoulders on to his own and I could trust him to carry it. Physically he was smaller than I. But mentally! Morally!

OF COURSE I was indicted. I knew better than to expect to escape that. It didn't worry me. I was glad to learn there wasn't going to be a long wait for a trial. And when that began I was so confident I watched my lawyer fight for me very much as if it had been some other man's trial.

Naturally I had never had quite his kind of a lawyer before. He was a wonder to me. I'd had men wrangle over all the little points in my behalf, and get away with their share of them. But they made it look somehow like legal trickery; and I had never felt that it helped much with the jurymen who were as apt as not to conclude that the merits of a case were few when it needed such cheap backing.

This man fought differently for the points. He was not playing tricks. He was using what the sacred law had provided to guard wrongly accused men from miscarriage of justice. He gave me a new respect for

laws that I had often felt were mere properties of the legal conjurers.

He made a monkey of the coroner who had declared that Scrooks had been dead six hours when found and now had to admit that he couldn't tell whether it had been six hours or two. He played hard on the fact that the bloody thumb-print was neither mine nor the dead man's and that no thumb-print of mine was to be found on the furniture in the room. He had got a regular exhibit of photographs of marks from that room. It did seem to me that they would create a reasonable doubt in the minds of all twelve of any dozen men in the world.

And he did not fail to get in enough of the old miser's meanness to give a jury the feeling that society had not been robbed by Scrooks's demise. The judge was bound to let such a big man put over some things a lesser one couldn't have got across at all. Scrooks's meanness was immaterial all right, in the eyes of the law. When he had got through, on the ground of showing that there were many people who might desire to kill the murdered man, the whole thing was stricken out. But those things can't be stricken out of men's minds on a judge's ruling as to the record.

All through, it seemed to me the greatest fight I had ever seen put up in a court. I could not see how he could have fought harder or better had his own life been at stake. And I never doubted the issue of it—until right at the end.

And then—it was as my lawyer was winding up his final plea—I gave a look over the jurymen's faces while he was putting the last smashing argument on to a pile of them he had slammed down one on the other in his quiet, masterfully conversational manner of delivering what was really a splendid peroration. It was not a questioning look—I had no question. If I had been situated to put that look into words it would have been with a slap on the foreman's back and sounded like a yell of, "I guess he's good, eh?" You get the idea.

Suddenly I went sick. I had faced too many jury faces before not to know. During this trial I had watched my lawyer instead of the men with whom would rest the ultimate decision as to my fate. Now I saw that they had decided—against me!

Have you noticed how many men there were who seemed to feel they had to defend God because men had gone so bad as to make this big war? Quite a while back I read of an old preacher who killed himself because he said the war had convinced him there was nothing to what he had believed. Well, it was like that with me. The discovery that we had lost started me to doubting the man who had done the fighting for me. I began to wonder. I began to see certain things. I woke up with a start.

That man hadn't done something he might have done. He hadn't come through with all he had. He was holding out—and the thing he was holding was something in my favor.

What was it? I didn't know, couldn't give a guess. It was something I had even felt once or twice, but put away because I was too sure of him to consider it. Absolutely nothing concrete, understand. But I had caught myself starting to wonder a bit if I were really seeing him quite so eye to eye as I thought—caught myself and quit the wondering.

Now that wonder grew like a mushroom in the dark of my despair. My faith melted. I had trusted a face and a voice of which I was ready yet to swear that they were the straightest face and voice in the world, and they had failed me.

Yes, all my faiths went weak. They'd never been strong enough to affect my living; now they dimmed to where they gave no hope or wish at all for what I had never wished sufficiently. He had fought for me, fought hard for me, fought far better than any other lawyer had ever done by me. But I had thought he would give all he had to save my life—and he had not done that.

Oh, it is pretty apt to be the lot of the man who does big favors to have the recipients of his charity turn on him and rend him in the end for failing to do something more than he can do. Perhaps what I thought was the same thing that passes in the minds of all the ungrateful dogs who are never satisfied. I was desperate. I had lulled myself in a false security and now discovered that I was face to face with a murderer's death. All the God I believed in was made up of the best I had believed of men. Now my belief in them all was gone.

I saw nothing now of generosity in his

efforts to save me. I built up an instant suspicion—nay, a certainty that if I knew all he knew I would know that he had ends of his own to serve. It made no difference to me that I had no earthly ground for even the suspicion. I guess mine was the mental process of all the breed of yellow dogs who bite the hand that has fed them all it held. But—*I was right about it all.*

The jury was out for quite a while; they barely escaped being locked up for the night. Such a stay had not been expected, and I had not been led out to be brought back in when they should return with their verdict. They kept me in the courtroom and everybody else sat tensely and waited, and fairly jumped at every little sound that might have been the first distant footfall of the foreman at the head of those fate-laden twelve.

And most of that while I eyed the man who had defended me. Sometimes it seemed to me he wanted a favorable verdict more than I whose life was at stake. He was white to the lips; his hands clenched on the table before him, with the knuckles standing out red against veins as white as his face; he appeared buried in thought that was more terrible even than my fate.

Only once did he lift his gaze. He looked twice almost all around the room and each time deliberately blinked in passing his look by me. Then he as deliberately looked straight at me for a full minute. He seemed to search my face for an answer to some great question. Then he looked down and slowly shook his head. There is no use in my trying to give you any of the guesses I've made since as to what he was thinking.

The jury came back eventually. I've learned since that only one man had stood out all that time, and he on an inward question of the validity of a less than half doubt. They said I was guilty of murder in the first degree. The judge thanked them.

My lawyer made the usual motion for retrial, asked for the usual chance to appeal. The judge refused both requests, of course, and announced that he would pronounce sentence two days later.

IN THOSE two days no word reached me from my counsel. I was told that he was out of town. They said that they were unable to get him by telephone or to find him. I know now that they told the truth as to part of the time. One day he had spent in useless effort to move the judge; the other he had gone—gone somewhere to be alone.

He came to me with the officers that opened my cell to lead me back to court for sentence. He was thinner, older than he had been two days before; he was twenty years older than when the trial had begun. He took my hand. His was cold and trembled.

"Don't be afraid, old man," he whispered thickly in my ear. "I know you didn't do this; and I'm not going to let you hang for it."

I wheeled to curse him for his futile promises. Then I paused. I knew—knew that he spoke the truth, knew that all the curtains were ready to fall, that we were coming where we should see.

He made a short plea for clemency. It sounded to me as if it were half-hearted, hopeless—as if he were not even sure he wanted what he asked. And yet I trusted him again. And the judge shook his head and stood me up and stood up himself.

"Have you anything to say as to why sentence should not be pronounced upon you?" I was asked.

I hadn't. *He* had whatever reason there might be. But——

"I am not guilty of this crime," I cried, as the last desperate, hopeless thing I could do to stop the black doom that was coming down upon me.

"Is that all?" asked the judge coldly.

I dropped my head. It was all I had—and it was nothing.

Inside me something snapped. The judge was drawing a long breath wherewith to begin the terrifically solemn words that should order a fellow man's death. But I was eyeing a paper-weight on his desk, calculating the possibility of gaining it before the officer at my side could twist the steel on my other wrist, the further possibility of using it for one blow that should crush the skull of the man who had failed me twice. They could hang me no longer for two murders than one.

And then——

"Your Honor!"

It was a cry more desperate than I might have uttered. The judge jumped a little in his surprize.

"I can not let you sentence this man to death!" My counsel said as he stepped

forward from where he had risen with the rest in the room. The judge just stared at him.

"There have been things brought out at the trial of the prisoner which puzzle me, things which make me sure that robbery was attempted and, perhaps, accomplished after the death of Jonathan Scrooks—sure, too, that my client was more likely than any other man in the world to be guilty of that robbery. But, your Honor, he did not commit the murder. *I killed Jonathan Scrooks myself!*"

I know there was a sensation that fairly shook every one else in the room; but my own sensations are all I shall ever be able to recall.

"Good God! Governor—you're crazy!" gasped the judge.

I heard that. It struck me instantly as being the exact truth.

"No—listen," commanded the ex-governor. "It all fits together, I think. We have had to admit in the trial that my client was at the dead man's house from ten to eleven. He has testified that he left because he heard some one coming into the yard. It was I who frightened him away.

"I tried to get into the record that the greatest part of Scrooks's wealth was stolen from the widow of James Upton, and that I was preparing to prosecute him criminally as well as civilly to get the old lady her rights. We need not go into the details of that right now. Enough that he had papers which I needed to complete my case, and which he could not afford to destroy under any circumstance. I felt safe in giving him a chance to make reparation without prosecution. Not that I cared much to spare him; but Mrs. Upton's health is such that I was anxious to save her the strain of appearances in court. Our interview was arranged for the late hour because he desired the utmost privacy.

"I shall have no difficulty in showing by many witnesses that Scrooks, for all his sixty years, was a man of unusual physical strength. He was of big stature and the kind of brawn some men can preserve without any exercise. But it did not occur to my mind that there was danger of any violence to myself.

"He listened to my demonstration that I could prove my case. He took it very quietly. I thought he was figuring on terms of settlement, preparing to open the bargaining. He opened a drawer of the desk before him without betraying a quiver of excitement, then whirled upon me with a pistol pointed at my head.

"That pistol was the cheap little revolver that has been in evidence in this case. Scrooks was penurious even in protecting himself.

"'Governor,' he then told me coolly, 'you are not going out of here alive. You've come here and threatened to blackmail me. You've become violent at my refusal to be blackmailed. I shall have had to shoot you in self-defense.'

"A look into his face was sufficient to convince me that he was stupid enough to imagine he could keep from the gallows with such a flimsy defense against the charge of murder. But Scrooks's hanging would be too late consolation for the victim of his folly. I sprang at him and was quick enough to knock the pistol from his hand.

"And I was quick enough to duck past him and after it, and to get it before he got me. But I was not quick enough to keep him from leaping upon me as I stooped to pick up the weapon. I clung to it as I went on down. I fired over my shoulder as he fought to use the advantage of his position on my back.

"I have no recollection of firing more than once. It has been shown plainly that I must have fired twice. A fight for life is a pretty exciting event.

"He toppled off my back—fell beside me. A jagged line of red showed along his temple. The blood spurted from it. I tried to stop it with my hand, then with a kerchief that lay on his desk—the bloody handkerchief that we have had here. And that bloody thumbprint—"

My lawyer—my man—was standing close to the clerk's desk. He reached over and seized an ink-pad for a rubber stamp.

"Stop! Stop! Oh, my God!" the judge fairly groaned.

But my man pressed his thumb upon the pad, picked up a bit of paper—pushed it toward the judge

"Yes, that's it," he resumed. "And Scrooks lay still. I could not feel any pulse in his wrist. I had always thought I had fair nerves, but I lost them then. I simply ran.

"I am afraid my client blew open the safe after that. I could not have done that. But I killed Jonathan Scrooks. If

any one is to be hung for it—and I know no way to prove what I have told here of self-defense—I must be the one. You can't hang this man for burglary."

The judge would not have it. "Great Heaven!" he cried. "You're crazy—crazy. Why didn't you give us all this before?"

"Good God, judge!" cried the ex-governor. "Don't you see where I stand now? Do you think I'd tell this if I could have got my man free any other way?"

"My man!" It was what I had been calling him from the moment I had seen him first. My man! Yes—I was gladder of that than of my freedom. You don't have to believe it because I say it. It's on the record.

I proved then that I cared for such things as squareness and right. I might never prove it again. Sometimes, when I think that I'm here for ten years more, I'm tempted to be sorry I did it. And the doctors say I'll never live those ten years. I had the cough before I came; I'd be dead already with it and the booze and the coke outside. But I'd have died a free man. Yet—I did it.

I confess that I had killed Jonathan Scrooks.

Yes, at two o'clock I slipped out of the little road-house, and went back to the big, lonely home of the hermit miser. I jimmied my way into that window before which, three hours earlier, I had waited and watched. Then, with an electric torch, I made my way across the room toward the safe. The light happened to strike on the revolver where the ex-governor had dropped it. I picked it up and pocketed it, not even noticing that it was the exact mate of the one I had purchased that morning in another town.

I blew the safe. I didn't make a good job with the soup; the blast was too big. I stood still, frightened at the noise I had made, my torch shut off. I heard a sound in the far corner of the room, which I had not heeded at all, since I had already fixed the locations of the room in my mind. Before I could pull myself together to move the lights of the room flashed on.

I had not realized how big Scrooks was, while he had sat at his desk during my wait at the window. Now he looked a very giant. His face was a horrible thing to see, with great streaks of blood dried around a long gash at the temple. And he started toward me. The angel of death, the devil himself in the flesh, could not have inspired such a panic of irrational fear.

And I fired at the terror—fired straight at the heart. I stopped only long enough to shove the pistol into his dead fingers and then, my nerve completely gone, I fled by the way I had come.

OF COURSE my confession freed the governor, and it got my sentence commuted to fifteen years.

Fifteen years—in here! Sometimes I wish they had not commuted my sentence. Sometimes I think I'll go mad.

Ten years more, and no chance to live it out!

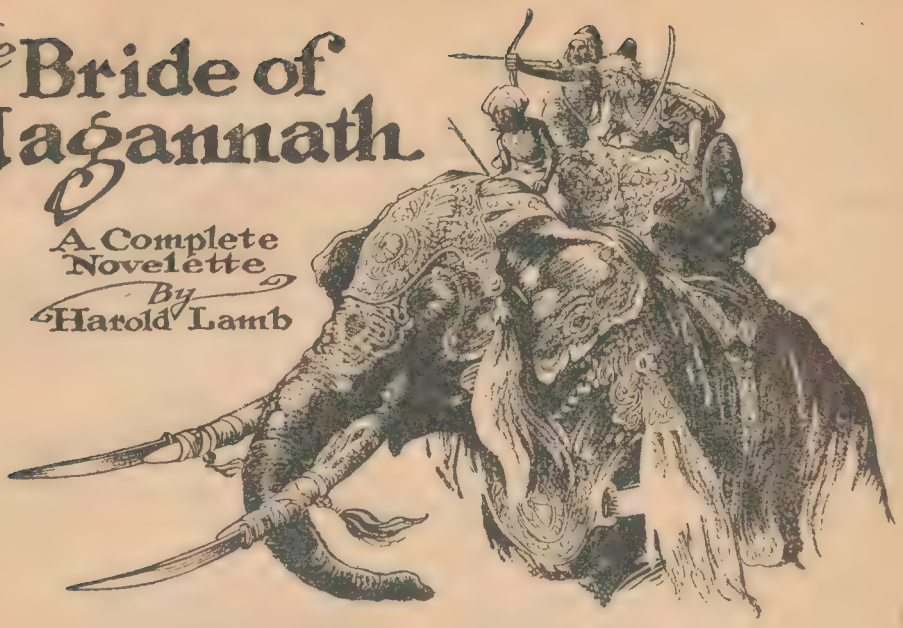
But I've still got my poor, bad-man's theology. And it keeps me hoping and beliving that the next Judge is going to look just enough like the man who was my last counsel—to make me sure that He'll be as square to any man as the squarest that man ever got to be.

And then this last stretch of mine seems easier than the others I've done; and sometimes I'm—well, almost glad.

The Bride of Jagannath

A Complete Novelette

By Harold Lamb



Author of "Ameer of the Sea," "The Lion Cub," etc.

Down past the stone shrine of Kedarnath, down and over the tall grass of the Dehra-Dun, marched the host of the older gods. The Pandas marched with feet that touched not the tall grass. Past the *deva-prayag*—the meeting-place of the waters—came the older gods bearing weapons in their hands.

In the *deva-prayag* they washed themselves clean. The gods were very angry. The wind came and went at their bidding.

Thus they came. And the snow-summits of Himal, the grass of the valley, and the meeting-place of the waters—all were as one to the gods.

The Vedas.

THE heavy morning dew lay on the grass of the Land of the Five Rivers, the Punjab. The hot, dry monsoon was blowing up from the southern plain and cooling itself among the foot-hills of the Siwalik in the year of our Lord 1609 when two riders turned their horses from a hill-path into the main highway of the district of Kukushetra.

It was a fair day, and the thicket through which the trail ran was alive with the flutter of pigeons and heavy with the scent of wild thyme and jasmine and the mild odor of the fern-trees. The sun beat on them warmly, for the Spring season was barely past and they were riding south in the eastern Punjab, by the edge of Rajasthan, toward the headwaters of the Ganges, in the empire of Jahangir, Ruler of the World and Mogul of India.

"A fair land," said one. "A land ripe with sun, with sweet fruits and much grain. Our horses will feed well. Here you may rest from your wounds——"

He pointed with a slender, muscular hand to where a gilt dome reared itself over the cypress-tops on a distant hill-summit.

"*Eh*, my Brother of Battles," he said, "yonder shines the dome of Kukushetra. Aye, the temple of Kukushetra wherein dwells an image of Jagannath——"

"*Jagannath!*"

It was a shrill cry that came from the roadside. A small figure leaped from the bushes at the word and seized the bridles of both horses. They reared back and he who had pointed to the temple muttered a round oath.

"Jagannath!" cried the newcomer solemnly.

He was a very slender man, half-naked, with a gray cloth twisted about his loins. The string hanging down his left chest indicated—as well as the caste-mark on his forehead—that he was a Brahman, of the lesser temple order.

"The holy name!" he chanted. "Lord of the World! Brother to Balabhadra and to Subhadra! Incarnation of the mighty Vishnu, and master of the Kali-*damana!* Even as ye have named Jagannath, so must ye come to the reception hall of the god——"

"What is this madness?" asked the elder of the two riders gruffly.

The Brahman glanced at him piercingly and resumed his arrogant harangue.

"The festival of Jagannath is near at hand, warrior," he warned. "This is the land of the mighty god. Come, then, to the temple and bring your gift to lay at the shrine of Jagannath of Kukushetra, which is only less holy than the shrine of Puri itself, at blessed Orissa. Come——"

"By Allah!" laughed the first rider. "By the ninety-nine holy names of God!"

He shook in his saddle with merriment. The Brahman dropped the reins as if they had been red hot and surveyed the two with angry disappointment.

"By the beard of the Prophet, and the ashes of my grandsire—this is a goodly jest," roared the tall warrior. "Behold, a pilgrim hunter come to solicit Abdul Dost and Khlit of the Curved Saber."

He spoke Mogholi, whereas the misguided Brahman had used his native Hindustani. Khlit understood Abdul Dost. Yet he did not laugh. He was looking curiously at the marked brow of the priest, which had darkened in anger at the gibe of the Moslem.

"*Eh*—this is verily a thing to warm the heart," went on Abdul Dost. "A Brahman, a follower of Jagannath, bids us twain come to the festival of his god. He knew not that I am a follower of the true Prophet, and you, Khlit, wear a Christian cross of gold under the shirt at your throat."

He turned to the unfortunate pilgrim hunter.

"Nay, speaker-of-the-loud-tongue, here is an ill quarter to cry your wares. Would the wooden face of armless Jagannath smile upon a Moslem and a Christian, think you?"

"Nay," quoth the priest scornfully, "not so much as upon a toad, or a pariah who is an eater of filth."

In his zeal, he had not taken careful note of the persons of the two travelers.

He scanned the warriors keenly, lo king longest at Khlit. The elegantly dressed Afghan, with his jeweled simitar and his silver-mounted harness and small, tufted turban, was a familiar figure.

But the gaunt form of the Cossack was strange to the Brahman. Khlit's bearded cheeks were haggard with hardship and illness in the mountains during the long Winter of Kashmir, and his wide, deep-set eyes were gray. His heavy sheepskin coat was thrown back, disclosing a sinewy throat and high, rugged shoulders.

In Khlit's scarred face was written the boldness of a fighting race, hardened, not softened by the wrinkles of age. It was an open face, lean and weather-stained. The deep eyes returned the stare of the priest with a steady, meditative scrutiny.

Abdul Dost was still smiling. His handsome countenance was that of a man in the prime of life, proud of his strength. He sat erect in a jeweled saddle, a born horseman and the finest swordsman of northern Hindustan. He rode a mettled Arab. Khlit's horse was a shaggy Kirghiz pony.

"It is time," broke in Khlit bluntly—he was a man of few words—"that we found food for ourselves and grain for our horses. Where lies this peasant we seek?"

Abdul Dost turned to the watching priest, glancing at the sun.

"Ho, hunter of pilgrims," he commanded, "since we are not birds for your snaring—and the enriching of your idol—tell us how many bow-shot distant is the hut of Bhimal, the catcher of birds. We have ridden since sunup, and our bellies yearn."

The Brahman folded his arms. He seemed inclined to return a sharp answer, then checked himself. His black eyes glinted shrewdly. He pointed down the dusty highway.

"If the blind lead the blind, both will fall into the well," he chanted. "Nay, would you behold the power of the name of Jagannath whom you foolishly deride? Then come with me to the abode of this same Bhimal. I will guide you, for I am bound thither myself on a quest from the temple."

"So be it," nodded Abdul Dost carelessly and urged his horse forward, offering the pilgrim hunter a stirrup which the Brahman indignantly refused.

ABDUL DOST was not the man to repent his own words, spoken freely. But he understood better than Khlit the absolute power of the Hindu priests in the Land of the Five Rivers.

The fertile province of Kukushetra was a favorite resort for the Hindu pilgrims of the highlands. Here were the ruins of an ancient temple, near which the new-gilded edifice—a replica of that at Puri at the Ganges' mouth—had been built. Here also

were gathered the priests from the hill monasteries, to tend the shrine of the Kukushetra Jagannath.

Religious faith had not made a breach between Khlit and Abdul Dost. The Cossack was accustomed to keep his thoughts to himself, and to the *mansabdar* friendship was a weightier matter than the question of faith. He had eaten bread and salt with Khlit.

He had nearly slain the Cossack in their first meeting, and this had made the two boon companions. Khlit had treated his wounds with gunpowder and earth mixed with spittle—until Abdul Dost substituted clean bandages and ointment.

The two ate of the same food and slept often under the same robe. They were both veteran fighters in an age when a man's life was safeguarded only by a good sword-arm. Abdul Dost was pleased to lead his comrade through the splendid hill country of northern India perhaps influenced—for he was a man of simple ideas—by the interest which the tall figure of Khlit always aroused among the natives.

Khlit was well content to have the companionship of a man who liked to wander and who had much to say of India and the wars of the Mogul. Khlit himself was a wanderer who followed the path of battles. From this he had earned the surname of the "Curved Saber."

It was the first time that Khlit had set foot in Hindustan, which was the heart of the Mogul empire.

The priest, who had maintained a sullen silence, halted at a wheat-field bordering the road. Here a bare-legged, turbaned man was laboring, cutting the wheat with a heavy sickle and singing as he worked.

The Brahman called, and the man straightened, casting an anxious eye at the three in the road. Khlit saw his eyes widen as he recognized the priest.

"Greeting, Kurral," spoke the man in the field; "may the blessing of divine Vishnu rest upon you."

"Come, Bhimal," commanded the Brahman sharply; "here be barbarian wayfarers who seek your hut. Lay aside your sickle. Your harvesting is done."

With a puzzled glance over his shoulders at the half-gathered grain Bhimal the *chiria mars*—Hindu of the bird-slaying caste—led the way to his cottage beside the field. It was a clay-walled hut with roof of thatched roots, under the pleasant shade of a huge banyan.

On either side the door within the shade grapevines were trained upon a lattice; in the rear an open shed housed two buffalo—the prized possession of Bhimal and his brother.

At the threshold, however, the slayer of birds hesitated strangely and faced his companions as if unwilling for them to enter. Khlit and Abdul Dost dismounted, well content with the spot, where they had heard a good breakfast for a man and beast might be had from the hospitable Bhimal. They had unsaddled and were about to request a jar of water from the cottage tank under the banyan when a word from Kurral arrested them.

"Stay," muttered the Brahman.

Turning to Bhimal, he smiled, while the simple face of the old peasant grew anxious.

"Is it not true, Bhimal, that this cottage belongs to you and your brother, who departed long ago on a pilgrimage to Puri?"

"It is true, Kurral," assented Bhimal.

"That you own two fields and a half of good wheat ready for the harvest? And two buffalo? This cottage?"

At each question the peasant nodded.

"And a few rare birds which you caught in snares?"

Kurral drew a folded parchment from the robe at his waist and consulted it. Then he tossed it to Bhimal.

"You can not read, O slayer of birds," he smiled. "But this is a bond signed by your brother. You can make out his scrawl, over the endorsement of the holy priest of Puri, the unworthy slave of Jagannath. The bond is for the cottage and all the goods, animals and tools of your brother and yourself. It was sent from the mighty temple of Puri to the lesser shrine at Kukushetra. And I am come to take payment."

Khlit, not understanding Hindustani, yet read sudden misery in the lined face of Bhimal.

"How fares my brother?" cried the peasant.

"He brought fitting gifts of fruit, grain and oatmeal to the shrine of Jagannath, Bhimal. His zeal was great. All the coins that he had, he gave. But mighty Jagannath was ill rewarded by your brother, for you come not with him on the pilgrimage."

"Nay, I am sorely lame."

Bhimal pointed sadly to a partially withered leg.

"No matter," declared Kurral sternly. "Is Jagannath a pariah, to be cheated of his due—by miserable slayers of carrion birds? Your brother wrote the bond for this cottage and the fields. He offered it to the priest and it was taken. Thus he gained the blessing of all-powerful Jagannath."

"Then—he is ill?"

"Nay, I heard that he died upon the return journey, in the heat. By his death he is blessed—as are all those who perish on behalf of the All-Destroyer, whether under the wheels of the sacred car or upon the path of pilgrimage."

Bhimal hung his head in resignation. Abdul Dost, with a shrug of his slender shoulders, was about to take the jar of water from the tank when Kurral wheeled on him vindictively.

"Stay, barbarian!" he warned. "This tank and the cottage and the food within is now the property of the temple of Kukushetra. No unclean hand may be laid upon it."

Abdul Dost stared at him grimly and glanced questioningly at Bhimal.

"It is true," admitted the peasant sadly. "A bond given to the god by my brother is binding upon my unworthy self. Yet—" he faced Kurral beseechingly—"the wheat and the rare birds are all that I have to live through the season of rains.

"Suffer me to stay in the cottage and work on behalf of the god. I shall render you a just tribute of all, keeping just enough for my own life. I would strew the ashes of grief upon my head in solitude——"

"Nay," retorted Kurral; "would you mourn a life that has passed to the keeping of the gods? I have marked you as one of little faith. So you may not tend this property. Another will see to it."

A rebellious flicker appeared in the dim eyes of the peasant.

"Has not Jagannath taken the things that are dearest to me, Kurral?" he cried shrilly. "My brother's life and these good buffaloes? Nay, then let me keep but one thing!"

"What?" demanded the priest, still enjoying his triumph over the two warriors.

"A peacock with a tail of many-colored beauty. I have tended it as a gift to my lord, the Rawul Matap Rao, upon his marriage. I have promised the gift."

Kurral considered.

"Not so," he decided. "For the Rawul—so it is said—has not bent his head before the shrine of Kukushetra in many moons. It is rumored that he inclines to an unblessed sect, the worshipers of the sun-image of Vishnu—the followers of the *gosain* Chaitanya. He is unworthy the name of Hindu. Better the peacock should adorn the temple garden than strut for the pleasure of the bride of Rawul Matap Rao."

Then Khlit saw a strange form appear from within the entrance of the hut. In the dim light under the great tree it appeared as a glittering child with a plumed headress. Kurral, too, saw it and started.

"WHO names the Rawul with false breath?" cried the figure in a deep melodious voice. "Ho—it is Kurral, the pilgrim hunter. Methought I knew his barbed tongue."

By now Khlit saw that the figure was that of a warrior, standing scarce shoulder high to the Cossack and the tall Afghan. A slim, erect body was brightly clad, the legs bound by snowy white muslin, a shawl girdle of green silk falling over the loins, a shirt of finely wrought silvered mail covering the small body, the brown arms bare, a helmet of thin bronze on the dark head.

The man's face was that of a Hindu of the warrior caste, the eyes dark and large, the nostrils thin. A pair of huge black mustaches were twisted up either cheek. A quiver full of arrows hung at the waist-girdle.

In one hand the archer held a bow; under the other arm he clasped a beautiful peacock, whose tail had stirred Khlit's interest.

"Sawal Das!" muttered Kurral.

"Aye, Sawal Das," repeated the archer sharply, "servant and warrior of the excellent Rawul Matap Rao. I came to Bhimal's hut at sunup to claim the peacock, for my lord returns to his castle of Thaneswar tomorrow night. And now, O beguiler-of-men, have you wasted your breath; for I have already claimed the peacock on behalf of my lord."

"Too much of the evil juice of the grape has trickled down your gullet, Sawal Das," scowled the priest. "For that you came to

the hut—under pretense of taking the bird. You are a dishonor to your caste——

"Windbag! Framer of lies!"

The archer laughed.

"*Ohé*—are you one to question a warrior? When the very clients that come to your cell will not take food or water from the hand of a *Barna** Brahman. *Oho*—well you know that my master would hold himself contaminated were your shadow to fall across his feet."

He paused to stare at Khlit and Abdul Dost, whom he had not observed before.

"So you would steal from Jagannath!" fumed the priest.

"Nay."

The white teeth of the archer showed through his mustache.

"Am I one of the godless Kukushetra brethren who gorge themselves with the food that is offered to Jagannath? I plunder none save my lawful foes—behold this Turkish mail and helmet as witness!"

"Skulker!"

The hard face of the Brahman flushed darkly.

"Eavesdropper!"

"At least," retorted the warrior, "I take not the roof from over the head of the man whose guest I am."

He turned to the mournful Bhimal.

"Come, comrade, will you let this evil lizard crawl into your hut? A good kick will send him flying."

"Nay—"the peasant shook his head—"it may not be. My brother gave a bond."

"But your brother is dead."

"He pledged his word. I would be dishonored were I not to fulfil it."

Sawal Das grimaced.

"By Siva!" he cried. "A shame to give good grain and cattle to these scavengers. Half the farms of the countryside they have taken to themselves. Even the might of my lord the Rawul can not safeguard the lands of his peasants. If this thing must be, then come to Thaneswar where you will be safe from the greed of such as Kurral."

"I thank you, Sawal Das."

Bhimal looked up gratefully.

"But I would be alone for a space to mourn my brother who is dead."

"So be it," rejoined the archer, "but forget not Thaneswar. Rawal Matap Rao has need of faithful house-servants."

"Aye," observed the priest; "the time will come when he who sits in Thaneswar will have need of—hirelings."

Khlit, indifferent to the discussion which he did not understand, had watered his horse and searched out a basket of fruit and cakes of jellied rice within the hut. Coming forth with his prize, he tossed a piece of silver money to Bhimal.

The peasant caught it and would have secreted it in his garments, but Kurral's sharp eye had seen the act.

"Take not the silver that is Jagannath's!"

He held out his hand.

"Or you will be accursed."

Reluctantly the peasant was about to yield the money to the priest when Sawal Das intervened.

"The bond said naught of money, Kurral," he pointed out. "Is your hunger for wealth like to a hyena's yearning for carrion? Is there no end of your greed? Touch not the dinar."

The priest turned upon the archer furiously.

"Take care!" he cried. "Kukushetra has had its fill of the idolatry of the Rawul and the insolence of his servants. Take care lest you lose your life by lifting hand against mighty Jagannath!"

"I fear not the god," smiled Sawal Das. "Lo, I will send him a gift, even Jagannath himself, by the low-born Kurral."

So swiftly that the watching Abdul Dost barely caught his movements, the archer dropped the peacock and plucked an arrow from its quiver. In one motion he strung the short bow and fitted arrow to string.

Kurral backed away, his eyes widening in sudden fear. Evidently he had reason to respect the archer. A tree-trunk arrested his progress abruptly.

Sawal Das seemed not to take aim, yet the arrow flew and the bowstring twanged. The shaft buried itself deep into the tree-trunk. And the sacred cord which hung to Kurral's left shoulder was parted in twain.

Kurral gazed blankly at the severed string and the arrow embedded not two inches from his ear. Then he turned and fled into the thicket, glancing over his shoulder as he went.

"A good shot, that, archer," laughed Abdul Dost.

*One of the lowest orders of the priesthood.

"It was nought," grinned Sawal Das. "On a clear day I have severed the head from a carrion bird in full flight. Nay, a good shaft was wasted where it will do little good."

He strutted from the hut, gathering up the peacock.

"If you are strangers in Kukushetra," he advised, "you would do well to seek the door of my master, Rawul Matap Rao. He asks not what shrine you bow before, and he has ever an ear for a goodly song or tale, or—" Sawal Das noted the Afghan's lean figure appraisingly— "employment for a strong sword-arm. He is a just man, and within his gates you will be safe."

"So there is to be a marriage feast at Thaneswar?"

"Aye," nodded the archer, "and rare food and showers of silver for all who attend. This road leads to Thaneswar castle by the first turn up-hill. Watch well the path you take, for there are evil bandits—servants of the death-loving Kali—afoot in the deeper jungle."

With that he raised a hand in farewell and struck off into a path through the brush, singing to himself, leaving Bhimal sitting grief-stricken on the threshold of the hut and Khlit and Abdul Dost quietly breakfasting.

II

ON THAT day the young chieftain of Thaneswar had broken the *torun* over the gate of Rinthambur.

The *torun* was a triangular emblem of wood hung over the portal of a woman who was to become a bride. Matap Rao, a clever horseman, rode under the stone arch, and while the women servants and the ladies of Rinthambur laughingly pelted him with flowers and plaited leaves he struck the *torun* with his lance until it fell to earth in fragments.

This done, as was customary, the mock defense of Rinthambur castle ceased; the fair garrison ended their pretty play and Rawul Matap Rao was welcomed by the men within the gate.

He was a man fit to be allied by blood even with the celebrated chiefs of the Rinthambur clan—a man barely beyond the limits of youth, who had many cares and who administered a wide province—Thaneswar—with the skill of an elder.

Perhaps the Rawul was not the fighting type beloved by the minstrels of the Rinthambur house. He was not prone to make wars upon his neighbors, choosing rather to study how the taxes of his peasants might be lightened and the heavy hand of the Kukushetra temple be kept from spoliation of the ignorant farmers.

The young Rawul, last of his line, was a breeder of fine horses, a student and a philosopher of high intelligence. He was the equal in birth to Retha of Rinthambur—the daughter of a warlike clan of the sun-born caste. She had smiled upon his wooing and the chieftains who were head of her house were not ill content to join the clans of Rinthambur and Thaneswar by blood.

War on behalf of the Mogul, and their own reckless extravagence with money and the blood of their followers, had weakened the clan. The remaining members had gathered at Rinthambur castle to pay fitting welcome to the Rawul.

"We yield to your care," they said, "her who is the gem in the diadem of Rajasthan—Retha of Rinthambur—who is called 'Lotus Face' in the Punjab. Guard her well. If need arise command our swords, for our clans are one."

So Matap Rao joined his hand to that of Retha, and the knot in their garments was tied in the hall of Rinthambur before the fire altar. Both Matap Rao and the Rinthambur chieftains were descendants of the fire family of the Hindus—devotees of the higher and milder form of Vishnu worship.

"Thaneswar," he said, "shall be another gate to Rinthambur and none shall be so welcome as the riders of Rinthambur."

But the chieftains after bidding adieu to him and his bride announced that they would remain and hold revelry in their own hall for two days, leaving the twain to seek Thaneswar, as was the custom.

Thus it happened that Matap Rao, flushed with exultation and deep in love, rode beside his bride to the boundary of Rinthambur, where the last of the bride's clan turned back. His followers, clad and mounted to the utmost finery of their resources, fell behind the two.

The way seemed long to Matap Rao, even though a full moon peered through the soft glimmer of twilight and the minstrel of Thaneswar—the aged *Vina*, Perwan Singh—chanted as he rode behind

them, and the scent of jasmine hung about their path. In the Thaneswar jungle at the boundary of the two provinces a watch tower stood by the road, rearing its bulk against the moon.

Here were lights and soft draperies and a banquet of sugared fruits, sweetened rice, jellies, cakes and curries, prepared by the skilled hands of the women slaves who waited here to welcome their new mistress. And here the party dismounted, the armed followers occupying tents about the tower.

While they feasted and Matap Rao described the banquet that was awaiting them on the following night at Thaneswar hall, Perwan Singh sang to them and the hours passed lightly, until the moon became clouded over and a sudden wind swept through the forest.

A drenching downpour come upon the heels of the wind; the lights in the tower were extinguished, and Retha laid a slim hand fearfully upon the arm of her lord.

"It is an ill omen," she cried.

"Nay," he laughed, "no omen shall bring a cloud upon the heart of the queen of Thaneswar. Vishnu smiles upon us."

But Retha, although she laughed with her husband, was not altogether comforted. And, the next morning, when a band of horsemen and camels met them on the highway, she drew closer to Matap Rao.

A jangle of cymbals and kettle-drums proclaimed that this was the escort of a higher priest of Kukushetra. Numerous servants, gorgeously dressed, led a fine Kabul stallion forward to meet the Rawul, and its rider smiled upon him.

This was Nagir Jan, *gosain* of Kukushetra and abbot of the temple.

He was a man past middle life, his thin face bearing the imprint of a dominant will, the chin strongly marked, the eyes piercing. He bowed to Retha, whose face was half-veiled.

"A boon," he cried, "to the lowly servant of Jagannath. Let him see but once the famed beauty of the Flower of Rinthambur."

Matap Rao hesitated. He had had reason more than once to feel the power of the master of the temple. Nagir Jan was reputed to be high in the mysteries of the nation-wide worship of Jagannath.

Owing to the wealth of the priests of the god, and the authority centered in his temples, the followers of Jagannath were the only Hindus permitted by the Mogul to continue the worship of their divinity as they wished. The might of Jagannath was not lightly to be challenged.

But Nagir Jan was also a learned priest familiar with the Vedas and the secrets of the shrine of Puri itself. As such he could command the respect of Matap Rao, who was an ardent Vishnu worshiper. For Jagannath, by the doctrine of incarnation, embodied the worship of Vishnu.

"If Retha consents," he responded, "it is my wish."

The girl realized that the priest had come far to greet her. She desired to please the man who was more powerful than the Rawul in Thaneswar.

So she drew back the veil. But her delicate face wore no smile. The splendid, dark eyes looked once, steadily into the cold eyes of the priest.

"Truly," said Nagir Jan softly, "is she named the Lotus Face. The lord of Retha is favored of the gods."

While the twain rode past he continued to look after the girl. Glancing over his shoulder presently, the Rawul saw that Nagir Jan was still seated on his horse, looking at them. He put spurs to his horse, forcing a laugh.

But after the festival at Thaneswar Matap Rao would have given much, even half his lands, if he had not granted the wish of Nagir Jan.

THE same thunder-storm that so disturbed the young bride of the Rawul caught Khlit and Abdul Dost on the open road.

The warriors had lingered long at the hospitable hut of Bhimal to escape the midday heat. So the sun was slanting over the wheat-fields when they trotted toward the castle of Thaneswar. It was twilight when they came upon the cross-roads described by the archer, Sawal Das.

Here was a grimy figure squatted upon a ragged carpet, the center of interest of a group of naked children who scampered into the bushes at sight of the riders.

The man was a half-caste Portuguese, hatless and bootless. On the carpet before him were a mariner's compass, much the worse for wear, and one or two tattered books, evidently—as Khlit surmised—European prayer-books. He glanced up covertly at the warriors.

"What manner of man is this?" wondered Abdul Dost aloud in Hindustani.

"An unworthy astrologer, so please you, great sirs," bowed the half-caste.

He closed both eyes and smiled.

"My mystic instrument of divination—" he pointed to the compass—"and my signs of the Zodiac."

He showed illuminated parchment pictures of the saints in the prayer-book.

"It is a goodly trade, and the witless ones of this country pay well. My name is Merghu. What can I do for the great sirs?"

"*Jaisa des waisahi bhes!*" (For such a country, such a masquerade) responded the Afghan contemptuously. "Will not the priest of Kukushetra beat your back with bamboos if they find you here at the cross-roads?"

Again the man's eyes closed slyly and his sullen face leered. He lifted a corner of his cloak, disclosing a huge, ulcerous sore.

"Nay, noble travelers. They may not touch what is unclean. Besides the festival of *Janam* approaches, and the priests are busied within the temple——"

"Enough!" growled the Afghan at a sign from Khlit, who had marked a cloud-bank creeping over the moon that was beginning to show between the tree-tops. "We are belated. We were told to take the upper hill trail to Thaneswar castle, but here be two trails. Which is the one we seek?"

"Yonder," muttered the astrologer, pointing. "The other leads to the temple."

Khlit and Abdul Dost spurred up the way he had indicated. Glancing back at the first turn in the trail, the Cossack noticed that the sham astrologer had vanished, with all his stock in trade.

But now wind whipped the tree-tops that met over the trail. Rain poured down in one of the heavy deluges that precede the wet season in this country.

Khlit rode unheeding, but Abdul Dost swore vehemently as his finery became soaked. He spurred his horse faster into the darkness without noticing where they went save that it was upward, trusting to the instinct of his mount to lead him safely.

So the two came at a round pace to a clearing in the trees. A high, blank wall emerged before them. This they circled until a gate opened and they trotted past a pool of water to a square structure with a high peaked roof whence came sounds of voices and the clang of cymbals.

"The wedding merriment has begun!" cried Abdul Dost.

He swung down from his horse and beat at a bronze door with fist and sword-hilt. Khlit, from the caution of habit, kept to his saddle. The door swung inward. A glare of light struck into their faces.

"Who comes to the hall of offerings of Jagannath?" cried a voice.

Khlit saw a group of Brahmans at the door. Behind them candles and torches lighted a large room filled with an assemblage of peasants and soldiers who were watching a dance through a wide doorway that seemed to lead into a building beyond.

In this farther space a cluster of young girls moved in time to the music of drums and cymbals, tossing their bare arms and whirling upon their toes so that thin draperies swirled about their half-nude forms.

Abdul Dost, who was a man of single thought, stared at the spectacle in astonishment, his garments dripping and rain beating upon his back.

"Who comes armed to the outer hall of the Lord of the World?" cried a young priest zealously. "Know ye not this is the time of the *Janam?*"

"I seek Thaneswar castle," explained the Afghan. "Is it not here? Nay, I am a traveler, not a slave of your god——"

"Begone then from here," commanded the young priest. "This is no place for those of—Thaneswar. Begone, one-without-breeding—low-born——"

"By Allah!" shouted Abdul Dost angrily. "Is this your courtesy to wayfarers in a storm!"

He swung back into his saddle, drawing his sword swiftly. Khlit, lest he should ride his horse into the throng, laid firm hand on the arm of the irate Moslem. They caught a passing glimpse of the dancing women staring at them, and the crowd. Then the door swung to in their faces with a clang.

"Low-born, they said in my teeth!" stormed the Afghan. "Base mouthers of indecency! Mockers of true men! Saw you the temple harlots offering their bodies to feast the eyes of the throng? Saw you the faithless priest offering food to the sculptured images of their armless gods——"

"Peace," whispered Khlit. "Here is an ill place for such words."

"Why laid you hand on my rein?" fumed Abdul Dost. "If you had fear in your heart for such as these—offscourings of thrice defiled dirt—why did you not flee? I would have barbered the head of yon shaven villain with my sword. *Eh—I* am not an old woman who shivers at hard words and sword-strokes——"

Khlit's grasp on his arm tightened.

"The rain is ceasing," growled the Cossack. "I can see the lights of Kukushetra village through the farther gate in the temple wall. Many men are afoot. Come. Thaneswar is a better place than this."

While the Cossack eyed the surroundings of the temple enclosure curiously Abdul Dost shrugged his shoulders.

"Age has sapped your courage, Khlit," muttered the *mansabdar*. "Verily, I heard tales of your daring from the Chinese merchants and the Tatars. Yet you draw back before the insult of a stripling priest."

Khlit wheeled his horse toward the gate jerking the bridle of the Afghan's mount.

"Aye, I am old," he said, half to himself. "And I have seen before this the loom of a man-trap. Come."

Sullenly the other trotted after him. Back on the trail the moon, breaking from the clouds by degrees, cast a network of shadows before them. The two rode in silence until Abdul Dost quickened his pace to take the lead.

"Perchance," he observed grimly, "that miscreant astrologer abides yet at the cross-roads. The flat of my sword laid to his belly will teach him not to guide better men than he astray."

Khlit lifted his head.

"Aye, the astrologer," he meditated aloud. "Surely he must have known the way to Thaneswar, as well as the temple path. It would be well, Abdul Dost, to watch better our path. Why did he speak us false? That is a horse will need grooming."

"Aye, with a sword."

The *mansabdar* rode heedlessly forward until they had gained the main road. Khlit, looking shrewdly on all sides, thought that he saw a figure move in the thicket at the side of the path. He checked his horse with a low warning to his companion.

But Abdul Dost, lusting for reprisal, slipped down from his saddle and advanced weapon in hand to the edge of the brush, peering into the shadows under the trees, which were so dense that the rain could barely have penetrated beneath their branches. Standing so, he was clearly outlined in the moonlight.

"Come forth, O skulker of the shadows!" he called. "Hither, false reader of the stars. I have a word for your ears— *Bismillah!*"

A dozen armed figures leaped from the bush in front of him. Something struck the mail on his chest with a ringing *clang*, and a spear dropped at his feet. Another whizzed past his head.

Abdul Dost gave back a pace, warding off the sword-blades that searched for his throat. Excellent swordsman that he was he was hard pressed by the number of his assailants. A sweeping blow of his simitar half-severed the head of the nearest man, but another weapon bit into his leg over the knee, and his startled horse reared back, making him half-lose his balance.

At this point Khlit spurred his horse at the foes of Abdul Dost, riding down one and forcing the others back.

"Mount!" he cried over his shoulder to the Afghan.

Abdul Dost's high-strung Arab, however, had been grazed by a spear and was temporarily unmanageable. Khlit covered his companion, avoiding the blows of the attackers cleverly. They pressed their onset savagely.

Abdul Dost, cursing his injured leg, tossed aside the reins of his useless mount and stepped forward to Khlit's side, his sword poised.

Then, while the two faced the ten during one of those involuntary pauses that occur in hand-to-hand fights, a new element entered into the conflict at the cross-roads.

There was a sharp twang, a whistling hum in the air, and one of the assailants flung up his arms with a grunt. In the half-light Khlit saw that an arrow had transfixed the man's head, its feathered end sticking grotesquely from his cheek.

A second shaft and a third sped swiftly, each finding its mark on their foes. One man dropped silently to earth, clutching his chest; a second turned and spun dizzily backward into the bush.

One of the surviving few flung up his shield fearfully in time to have an arrow peirce it cleanly and plant itself in his shoulder.

There was something inexorable and deadly in the silent flight of arrows. Those

who could stand, in the group of raiders, turned and leaped into the protecting shadows.

Khlit and Abdul Dost heard them running, breaking through the vines. They stared curiously at the five forms outstretched in the road. On the forehead of one who faced the moon, a shaft through his breast, they saw the white caste-mark of Jagannath.

Already the five had ceased moving.

"Come into the shadow, O heedless riders of the north," called a stalwart voice.

Khlit turned his horse, and was followed by Abdul Dost, who by this time had recovered his mount.

Under the trees on the farther side of the road they found Sawal Das, chuckling. The archer surveyed them, his small head on one side.

"Horses and sword-blades are an ill protection against the spears that fly in the dark," he remarked reprovingly.

"How came you here?" muttered Abdul Dost, who was in an ill humor, what with his hurt and the events of the night.

"Ohé—Oho!" Sawal Das laughed. "Am I not the right hand man of my lord, the Rawul? Does he not ride hither with his bride tomorrow? Thus, I watch the road.

"A short space ago when the rain ceased I heard an ill-omened group talking at the cross-roads. There was a half-caste *feringhi* who said that the two riders would return to seek the Thaneswar path——"

"The astrologer!" muttered Abdul Dost, binding his girdle over his thigh.

"Even so, my lord. Who is he but a spy of the temple? Ah, my bold swordsman, there be jewels in your turban and sword-hilt.

"Likewise—so Bhimal whispered—the low-born followers of the temple have orders to keep armed men from Thaneswar gate. I know not. But I waited with bow strung, believing that there would be sport——"

"Bravely and well have you aided us," said Khlit shortly in his broken Mogholi. "I saw others moving in the bush——"

"Perchance the evil-faced Kurral and his friends," assented Sawal Das, who understood.

"I will not forget," grunted the Cossack.

"Nay."

The archer took his rein in hand.

"This is no spot for our talk. I will lead you to Thaneswar, where you may sleep in peace."

He led them forward, humming softly to himself.

"Men of Jagannath have been slain," he murmured over his shoulder. "That will rouse the anger of the priests. Already the hot blood is in their foreheads at thought of the honor and wealth of my lord the Rawul. We will not speak of this, lest a cloud sully the bride-bringing of my lord."

"Verily," he said more softly, "did Perwan Singh, the chanter of epics, say that before long this place will be as it was in the days of the Pandas and the higher gods. Aye, Perwan Singh sang that blood would cover the mountains and bones will fill the valleys. Death will walk in the shadows of the men of Thaneswar."

Now, after they had gone, a form scurried from the thicket down the muddy highway, a heavy pack on its back. It paused not, nor looked behind. Merghu, the astrologer, was leaving Kukushetra.

III

There is One who knows the place of the birds who fly through the sky; who perceives what has been and what will be; who knows the track of the wind——

He is named by many names; yet he is but one.

—*Hymn to Vishnu.*

KHLIT was disappointed in the sight of Thaneswar castle. On the day following the affray of the cross-roads the Cossack was early afoot, and as the retainers were busied in preparing for the coming of their lord he was able to make the rounds of the place undisturbed save by a few curious glances.

The abode of Rawul Matap Rao was not a castle in the true sense of the word. In the midst of the wheat-fields of the province of Kukushetra a low wall of dried mud framed an enclosure of several buildings. The enclosure was beaten smooth by the feet of many animals, and against the wall were the stables, the elephant-stockade, the granaries and the quarters of the stable servants and the mahouts.

In the center of the site grew the garden of Thaneswar, a jumble of wild flowers, fern-trees and miniature deodars cleverly cultivated by gardeners whose hereditary task it was to tend the spot and keep clean

the paths through the verdure, artfully designed to appear as if a hapazard growth of nature.

An open courtyard ornamented by a great pool of water shadowed by cypresses fronted the garden. At the rear of the courtyard, it was true, a solid granite building stood—the hall of the Rawul.

Pillars of the same stone, however, supported a thatched roof, under which ran layers of cane. Numerous openings in the granite wall provided sleeping-terraces.

The inner partitions were mainly latticework, and only one ceiling—that of the main hall—was of stronger material than the thatch. This was of cedar, inlaid with ivory and mosaic, and brightly painted.

To Khlit, accustomed to the rugged stone structures of Central Asia, the small palace was but a poor fortress. He had no eye for the throng of diligent servants who were spreading clean cotton cloths over the floor mattresses or placing flowers in the latticework.

"The temple of the hill-god, yonder," he muttered to Sawal Das, who had joined him, "was stronger."

The archer fingered his mustache.

"Aye," he admitted restlessly. "I would that the Rawul had kept the heavy taxes upon the peasants, so that the armed retainers of Thaneswar would be more numerous and better equipped. I have scarce twoscore able men under me. And my lord has not many more men-at-arms to attend him. He would give the very gold of his treasury to the peasants, if need be.

"When I say that we should have more swords—when yonder eagle—" he pointed to the glittering dome of the temple—"cries out in greed—he laughs and swears that a word will rouse the peasantry and villagers of Kukushetra on our behalf. But I know not."

He shrugged his shoulders and dismissed his forebodings.

"Ah, well, warrior, who would dare to lift hand against Rawul Matap Rao, the last of the Thaneswar clan? Come, here is the choicest defender of Thaneswar, with his companions."

Sawal Das pointed to the stockade in one corner of the great enclosure. Here a half-dozen elephants were being groomed for the reception of the chieftain and his bride.

It was the first time that Khlit had seen the beasts near by and he strode over to gaze at them. Seeing his absorption in sight, the archer left to attend to his own affairs.

First the elephants were washed down well in a muddy pool outside the enclosure, reached by a wide gate through the wall. Then their heads, trunks and ears were painted a vivid orange, shaded off to green at the tips of the flapping ears and at the end of the trunk.

Then crimson silk cloths were hung over their barrels, and a triangular piece of green velvet was placed over their heads between the eyes. This done, silk cords with silver bells attached were thrown about their massive necks.

The largest of the huge animals, however, was attired in full war panoply. Bhimal, who had come with several of the household to gaze at the sight, touched Khlit's elbow.

"Behold Asil Rumi," he said in Mogholi.

Khlit and Abdul Dost had treated the lame peasant kindly—something rare in his experience—and he was grateful.

"The favorite elephant. He was a gift to the grandfather of the Rawul from a raja of Rinthambur. He has not his match for strength in this land. He is mightier than the storm-wind, which is the breath of the angry gods, for he can break down with his head a tree as big as my body."

The peasant sighed.

"Oftentimes, when the Rawul hunted tiger toward Rinthambur, Asil Rumi has trod down my wheat. But always the Rawul flung me silver to pay for the damage. A just man."

Khlit glanced at the old peasant.

"Have you left your farm?"

"Is it not Jagannath's? I would not dishonor the faith of my dead brother. See!" he cried.

Asil Rumi, with a thunderous internal rumbling, had planted his trunk against a post of the stockade a few yards from them. The elephant wore his battle armor—a bronze plate, heavily bossed, over his skull, stout leather sheets down either side, and twin sword-blades tied to his curving tusks.

Under the impact of the elephant's bulk the post creaked. Khlit saw it bend and heard it crack. The house servants ran back.

Asil Rumi leaned farther forward and the

post—a good yard thick—gave as easily before him as an aspen. Then his mahout ran up. Khlit was surprized to hear the man talk to the beast urgently. The mahout held a silver prong, but this he did not use. Asil Rumi drew back.

At a second word from his master the elephant coiled his trunk about the post and straightened it. Then he stood tranquil, his huge ears shaking, muttering to himself.

"How is it," asked Khlit, "that a small man such as that can command a beast like Asil Rumi? The beast could slay him with a touch of the tusk."

"Aye," assented Bhimal gravely, "the father of this mahout was slain by Asil Rumi when he was angry. But today he only plays. So long as this man speaks to him Asil Rumi will obey because of his love for the man."

And Bhimal told how two generations ago the elephant had taken part in one of the battles of Rajasthan. The standard of the warlike Rinthambur clan had been placed on his back, and his mahout had led him well into the van of the Rajputs, ordering him to stand in a certain spot.

The battle had been closely fought about the beast, and the mahout slain. The elephant had been wounded in many places and the greater part of the Rinthambur Rajputs slain about him. Still Asil Rumi had remained standing where he was placed.

The Rajputs had won the battle, so Bhimal said. The soldiers had left the field during the pursuit, but Asil Rumi had stayed by the body of his mahout, refusing food or water for three days in his sorrow for the man who had been his master.

Then they had brought the boy who was the son of the mahout. Him the elephant had recognized and obeyed.

"Asil Rumi will go to meet the bride of Rinthambur," concluded Bhimal. "She will mount his howdah, with her lord. It will be a goodly sight."

Presently came Abdul Dost, resplendent in a fresh tunic and girdle, to announce that it was time they should groom their horses for the ride to meet the Rawul.

But Khlit remained in the elephant-stockade watching the beasts until the household cavalcade had actually mounted, when he left the animals that had so stirred his interest. He washed his face hastily in the garden pool, drew his belt tighter about his *khalat*, pulled at his mustache and was ready to ride with the others.

BHIMAL excused himself to Sawul Das from accompanying the leaders of the peasants, saying that he was too lame to walk with the rest. Khlit, however, noticed that Bhimal kept pace with them as far as the cross-roads.

The bodies had been cleared away, and the feet of men and beasts had obscured the imprint of blood here. Bhimal lingered.

"So," said the Cossack grimly, "you go to Jagannath, not to your lord."

"Aye," said the peasant simply. "In the temple above is *he!* who is greater than any lord. *He* is master of death and life. My brother died in his worship. Wherefore should I not go?"

Khlit lingered behind the other horsemen, scanning Bhimal curiously. As the elephants had been strange beasts to him, so Bhimal and his kind were a new race of men.

It was Khlit's habit to ponder what was new to him. In this he differed from Abdul Dost.

"Have many of the Thaneswar peasants gone to the temple festival?" he inquired, noticing that the foot retainers with the cavalcade were few.

"Aye."

"What is the festival?"

"It is the great festival of Jagannath. *Janam,* the holy priest call it. They say it is to honor the birth of the god. It has always been."

"Will the Rawul and his woman go?"

Khlit did not care to revisit the temple after the episode of the night before.

"Nay. The Rawul has no love for the priests of the temple. He has said—so it is whispered through the fields—that they are not the true worshipers of Vishnu."

Down the breeze came the sound of the temple drums and cymbals. Khlit thought grimly that he also had no love for the servants of Vishnu.

"What is this Jagannath?" he asked indifferently.

To Khlit the worship of an idol by dance or song was a manifestation of Satan. He was a Christian of simple faith.

His tone, however, aroused the patient Hindu.

"Jagannath!" he cried, and his faded eyes gleamed. "Jagannath is the god of

the poor. All men stand equal before him. The raja draws his car beside the pariah. His festival lasts as many days as I have fingers, and every day there is food for his worshipers. It is the holy time when a bride is offered to Jagannath."

He pointed up to the temple.

"A woman is chosen, and she is blessed. She is called the bride of Jagannath. Food and flowers are given her. She rides in the front of the great car which we build with our hands when Jagannath himself comes from his temple and is borne in the car to the ruins of the holy edifice which was once the home of the older gods themselves.

"The woman—so Kurrul said—abides one night in the shrine of the god. Then Jagannath reveals himself to her. He tells the omens for the coming year, whether the crops will be good, the rains heavy and the cows healthy. Then this is told to us. It is verily the word of the god.

"Ah!" He glanced around. "I am late."

He hobbled off up the path, leaning on his stick, and Khlit spurred after the others, dismissing from his mind for a time what he had heard about the festival of *Janam.*

He soon forgot Bhimal in the confusion attending the arrival of the Rawul, and the banquet that night.

THERE was good cheer in Thaneswar. The young Rawul with his bride and his companions feasted on the gallery overlooking the main hall. The soldiery and retainers shared the feast at the foot of the hall, or without on the garden terrace.

Khlit and Abdul Dost had discovered that wine was to be had by those who so desired, and seated themselves in a corner of the hall with a generous portion of the repast and silver cups of sherbet between them.

"*Eh,*" cried the *mansabdar,* "these Hindus lack not a free hand. Did you mark how the Rawul scattered gold, silver and gems among the throng? The beauty of his bride has intoxicated him."

Khlit ate in silence. The music of Hindustan—a shrill clatter of instruments—held no charm for him. Abdul Dost, however, was accustomed to the melodies and nodded his head in time, his appreciation heightened by the wine.

"Last night," he said bluntly, "I spoke in haste, for I was angry. You are my brother in arms. By Allah, I would cut the cheek-bones from him who dared to say what I did."

He emptied his cup and cast a pleased glance over the merry crowd.

"It was a good word you spoke when Sawal Das led you to the horse of the Rawul and spoke your name to Matap Rao. *Eh,* Matap Rao asked whether you had a rank as a chieftain."

He smiled.

"You responded that a chieftain's rank is like to the number of men who will follow his standard in battle. That was well said.

"I have heard tales that you once were leader of as many thousands as Matap Rao numbers tens among his men. Is that the truth? It was in Tartary, in the Horde."

"That time is past," said Khlit.

"Aye. Perchance, though, such things may arise again. Sawal Das says that there may be fighting. Yet I scent it not. What think you?"

Abdul Dost glanced at Khlit searchingly. Much he had heard of the Cossack's craft in war.

Yet since their meeting Khlit had shown no desire to take up arms. Rather, he had seemed well content to be unmolested. This did not accord with the spirit of the fiery Afghan, to whom the rumor of battle was as the scent of life itself.

"I think," said Khlit, "that Matap Rao had done better to leave guards at the gate."

The Afghan shrugged his shoulders. Then lifted his head at the sound of a ringing voice. It was aged Perwan Singh, and his song was the song of Arjun that begins:

> As starlight in the Summer skies,
> So is the brightness of a woman's eyes—
> Unmatched is she!

Silence fell upon the hall and the outer corridors. All eyes were turned to the gallery where behind a curtain the young bride of Thaneswar sat beside the feast of Matap Rao and his companions, among them Perwan Singh.

> The sunbeam of the morning shows
> Within her path a withered lotus bud,
> A dying rose.
>
> Her footsteps wander in the sacred place
> Where stand her brethren, the ethereal race
> For ages dead!

A young noble of the household parted

the curtain at the song's end. He was a slender man, dark-faced, twin strings of pearls wound in his turban and about his throat—Serwul Jain, of Thaneswar.

"Men of Thaneswar," he cried ringingly, "the Lotus Face is now our queen. Happy are we in the sight of the flower of Rinthambur. Look upon Retha, wife of your lord."

There was a murmur of delight as the woman stood beside him. She was of an even height with the boy, the olive face unveiled, the black eyes wide and tranquil, the dark hair empty of jewels except for pearls over the forehead. Her thin silk robe, bound about the waist and drawn up from feet to shoulder, showed the tight underbodice over her breast and the outline of the splendid form that had been termed the "tiger-waisted."

"Verily," said Abdul Dost, "she is fair."

But Khlit had fallen asleep during the song. The minstrelsy of Hindustan held no charms for him, and he had eaten well.

A stir in the hall, followed by a sudden silence, aroused the Cossack. He was wide awake on the instant, scenting something unwonted. Abdul Dost was on his feet, as indeed were all in the hall. Within the doorway stood a group of Brahmans, surrounded by representatives of the higher castes of Kukushetra.

The castle retainer stood at gaze, curious and expectant. Through the open gate a breath of air stirred the flames of the candles.

"What seek you?" asked Serwul Jain from the gallery.

"We have come from the temple of Kukushetra, from the holy shrine of the Lord of the World," responded the foremost priest. "Rawul Matap Rao we seek. We have a message for his ears."

By now the chieftain was beside Retha. The eyes of the throng went from him to the Brahman avidly. It was the first time the Brahmans had honored Thaneswar castle with their presence.

"I am here," said the Rawul briefly. "Speak."

The Brahman advanced a few paces, drawing his robe closer about him. The servants gave back respectfully.

"This, O Rawul," he began, "is the festival of *Janam*. Pilgrims have come from every corner of the Bunjab; aye, from the Siwalik hills and the border of Rajasthan to the temple of Jagannath. Yet you remain behind your castle wall."

He spoke sharply, clearly. No anger was apparent in his voice, but a stern reproach. Behind him Khlit saw the gaunt figure of Kurral.

"The day of my wedding is just past," responded Matap Rao quietly, "and I abide here to hold the feast. My place is in my own hall, not at the temple."

"So be it," said the priest.

He flung his head back and his sonorous voice filled the chamber.

"I bear a message from the shrine. Though you have forgotten the reverence due to the Lord of the World, though you have said harsh words concerning his temple, though you have neglected the holy rites and slandered the divine mysteries—even though you have forsworn the worship of Jagannath—the Lord of the World forgives and honors you."

He paused as if to give his words weight with the attentive throng.

"For the space of years your path and that of the temple have divided. Aye, quarrels have been and blood shed. Last night five servants of the temple were slain on the highroad without your gate."

A surprized murmur greeted this. News of the fight had been kept secret by the priests until now, and Sawal Das had held his tongue.

"Yet Jagannath forgives. Matap Rao, your path will now lead to the temple. For tonight the bride of Jagannath is chosen. And the woman chosen is—as is the custom—fairest in the land of Kukushetra. Retha of Rinthambur."

Complete silence enveloped the crowd. Men gaped and started. Youthful Sewul Jain started and clutched at his sword. The lean hand of Perwan Singh arrested midway as he stroked his beard. The girl flashed a startled glance at her lord and drew the silk veil across her face.

A slow flush rose into the face of Matap Rao and departed, leaving him pale. He drew a deep breath and the muscles of his figure tightened until he was at his full height.

To be selected as the bride of the god on the *Janam* festival was held a high honor. It had been shared in the past by some of the most noted women of the land. The choice of the temple had never been denied.

But in the mild face of the Rawul was the shadow of fierce anger, swiftly mastered. He looked long into the eyes of the waiting

priest while the crowd hung upon his word.

"Whose is the choice?" he asked slowly.

"Nagir Jan himself uttered the decree. The holy priest was inspired by the thought that Retha, wife of the Rawul, should hear the prophecy of the god for the coming year. Who but she should tell the omens to Kukushetra?"

Matap Rao lifted his hand.

"Then let Nagir Jan come to Thaneswar," he responded. "Let him voice his request himself. I will not listen to those of lower caste."

IV

UPON the departure of the priests the curtain across the gallery was drawn. A tumult arose in the hall. Many peasants departed. The serving women fled back to their quarters, and the house retainers lingered, watching the gallery.

Abdul Dost leaned back against the wall, smiling at Khlit.

"By the beard of my grandsire! If I had such a bride as Retha of Rinthambur I would yield her not to any muttering Hindu priest."

He explained briefly to Khlit what had passed. The Cossack shook his head moodily.

"There will be ill sleeping in Thaneswar this night, Abdul Dost," he said grimly. "The quarrel between priest and chieftain cuts deeper than you think."

"It is fate. The Rawul may not refuse the honor."

Khlit stroked his gray mustache, making no response. The prime of his life he had spent in waging war with the reckless ardor of the Cossack against the enemies of the Cross. The wrong done to Bhimal had not escaped his attention. Nor had the one glimpse of the Kukushetra temple been agreeable to his narrow but heartfelt idea of a place of worship.

"When all is said," meditated the Afghan, "this is no bread of our eating."

"Nay, Abdul Dost. Yet we have eaten the salt of Matap Rao."

"Verily, that is so," grunted the Afghan. "Well, we shall soon see what is written. What is written, is written. Not otherwise."

Khlit seated himself beside his comrade and waited. Soon came Sawal Das through an opening in the wall behind them. Seeing them, he halted, breathing hard, for he had been running.

"*Aiel*" he cried. "It was an ill thought that led Matap Rao to thin the ranks of his armed men. Nagir Jan has watched Thaneswar ripen like a citron in the sun. He has yearned after the wheat-fields and the tax paid by the peasants. Truly is he named the snake. See, how he strikes tonight.

"*Aiel* He is cunning. His power is like that of the furious *daevas*. His armor is hidden, yet he is more to be feared than if a thousand swords waved about him."

Abdul Dost laughed.

"If that is the way the horse runs, archer, you could serve your master well by planting a feathered shaft under the ear of the priest."

Sawal Das shook his head.

"Fool!" he cried. "The Rawul would lose caste and life itself were he to shed the blood of a higher priest of Jagannath. He would be left for the burial dogs to gnaw. The person of Nagir Jan and those with him is inviolate."

"Then must Matap Rao yield up his bride."

The archer's white teeth glinted under his mustache.

"Never will a Rawul of Thaneswar do that."

Both men were surprized at the anger of the slender archer. They knew little of the true meaning of the festival of Jagannath.

"Perchance he will flee, Sawal Das. Khlit and I will mount willingly to ride with him. Your shafts would keep pursuers at a distance."

"I have been the rounds of the castle enclosure," observed Sawal Das. "The watchers of the temple are posted at every gateway and even along the wall itself. Their spies are in the stables. Without the enclosure the peasants gather together. They have been told to arm."

"On behalf of their lord?"

"Vishnu alone knows their hearts."

Abdul Dost reached down and gripped the arm of Sawal Das.

"Ho, little archer," he growled, "if it comes to sword-strokes—we have eaten the salt of your master, and we are in your debt. We will stand at your side."

"I thank you."

The Hindu's eyes lighted. Then his face fell.

"But what avail sword-strokes against Jagannath? How can steel cut the tendrils of his temple that coil about Thaneswar? Nay; unless my lord can overmaster him with fair words it will go ill with us."

He shook both fists over his head in impotent wrath.

"May the curse of Siva and Vishnu fall upon the master of lies! He has waited until the people of the countryside are aflame with zeal. He has stayed his hand until the Lotus Face came to Thaneswar as bride. Did not he ask to look upon her when she rode hither? *Aie*, he is like a barbed shaft in our flesh."

Came Bhimal, limping, to their corner.

"Nagir Jan is at the gate, Sawal Das," he muttered. "And behind him are the peasantry, soldiers and scholars of Kukushetra, many of them armed, to receive Retha as the chosen bride."

The archer departed. Bhimal squatted beside them, silent, his head hanging on his chest. Abdul Dost glanced at Khlit.

"Your pony is in the stable," he whispered. "Perchance if you ride not forth now the going will be ill."

"And so is yours, Abdul Dost," grunted Khlit. "Why do you not mount him?"

The Afghan smiled and they both settled back to await what was to come.

Nagir Jan entered the hall alone. Matap Rao advanced a few paces to meet him. Neither made a salaam. Their eyes met and the priest spoke first, while those in the hall listened.

"I have come for the bride of the *Janam*. Even as you asked it, I have come. Tonight she must bathe and be cleansed of all impurity. The women of the wardrobe and the strewers of flowers will attend her, to prepare her to mount the sacred car on the morrow. Then will she sit beside the god himself. And on that night will she kneel before him in the chamber in the ruins and the god will speak to her and manifest himself in the holy mystery. Where is the woman Retha?"

Matap Rao smiled, although his face was tense and his fingers quivered.

"Will you take the veil from your face? Will you withdraw the cloak from your words, Nagir Jan?"

The cold eyes of the priest flickered. His strong face showed no sign of the anger he must have felt.

"Nagir Jan, I will speak the truth. Will you answer me so?"

"Say on," assented the Brahman.

The young lord of Thaneswar raised his voice until it reached the far corners of the hall.

"Why do you hold me in despite, Nagir Jan? You have said that I am without faith. Yet do I say that my faith is as great as yours. Speak!"

A murmur went through the watchers. The youths standing behind Matap Rao glanced at each other, surprized by the bold course the Rawul had taken.

"Does a servant of Jagannath speak lies?" Nagir Jan smiled. "Is the wisdom of the temple a house of straw, to break before the first wind? Nay."

He paused, meditating. He spoke clearly, forcibly in the manner of one who knew how to sway the hearts of his hearers.

"Is not Jagannath Lord of the World, Matap Rao? In him is mighty Vishnu thrice incarnate; in him are the virtues of Siva, protector of the soul; and the virtues of Balabhadra and Subhadra. Since the birth of Ram, Jagannath has been. The power of Kali, All-Destroyer, is the lightning in his hand. Is not this the truth?"

Nagir Jan bowed his head. Matap Rao made no sign.

"Surely you do not question the holiness of Jagannath, protector of the poor, guardian of the pilgrim and master of our souls?" continued the priest. "Nay, who am I but a lowly sweeper of the floor before the mighty god?"

He stretched out a thin hand.

"Jagannath casts upon you the light of his mercy, Rawul. He ordains that your faithlessness be forgiven. Thus does Jagannath weld in one the twin rulers of Kukushetra.

"If you seek forgiveness, Kukushetra will prosper and the hearts of its men be uplifted. To this end has Jagannath claimed the beauty of Retha. Your wife will be the bond that will bind your soul to its forgotten faith."

He smiled and lowered his hand. Dignified and calm, he seemed as he said, the friend of the Rawul.

"Is not this the truth, Matap Rao? Aye, it is so."

The priest ceased speaking and waited for the other to reply.

IN HIS speech Nagir Jan had avoided the issue of Matap Rao's faith. He had spoken only of the claim of Jagannath. And a swift glance at his hearers showed him that his words had gone home. Many heads nodded approvingly.

The Rawul would not dare, so thought Nagir Jan, to attack the invisible might of Jagannath. By invoking the divinity of the god, Nagir Jan had made Matap Rao powerless to debate. And personal debate, he guessed, was the hope of Matap Rao.

Something of triumph crept into his cold face. Matap Rao was thoughtful, his eyes troubled. The chieftain was an ardent Hindu. How could he renounce his faith?

Abruptly his head lifted and he met the eyes of the priest.

"What you have said of Jagannath, incarnation of Vishnu, is verily the truth, Nagir Jan," responded the Rawul. "Yet it is not all the truth. You have not said that the *priests* of Jagannath are false. They are false servants of Vishnu. They are not true followers of the One who is master of the gods."

He spoke brokenly, as a man torn by mingled feeling.

"Aye. Wherefore do the priests of Kukushetra perform the rites in costly robes? Or anoint themselves with oil? With perfume, with camphor and sandal? Instead of the sacred Vedas, they chant the *prem sagar*—the ocean of love. The pictures and images of the temple are those of lust."

His voice was firmer now, with the ring of conviction.

"Aye, you are faithless servants. The rich garments that are offered by pilgrims to the gods, you drape once upon the sacred images. Then you wear them on your unclean bodies.

"What becomes of the stores of food yielded by peasants for the meals of Jagannath? Four times a day do you present food to the wooden face of the god; afterward you feast well upon it."

Nagir Jan showed no change of expression; but he drew back as if from contamination.

"You have forgotten the wise teachings of Chaitanya, who declared that a priest is like to a warrior," continued the Rawul. "The *gosain* preached that sanctity is gained by inward warfare, by self-denial and privation.

"You of Kukushetra follow the doctrine of Vallabha Swami. He it was who said that gratified desire uplifts the soul. And so do you live. What are the handmaidens of Jagannath but the prostitutes of the temple and its people?"

An uneasy stir among the listeners greeted this. Many heads were shaken.

"It is the truth I speak," cried the Rawul, turning to them. "Nagir Jan claims to be the friend of the poverty-afflicted. Is it so? He seeks devotees among the merchants and masters of wealth.

"He takes the fields of the peasants by forfeiture, contrary to law. He has taken much of my land. He seeks all of Thaneswar."

The young chieftain spread out his arms.

"My spirit has followed the way of Chaitanya. I believe that bloodshed is pollution. My household divinity is the image of the sun, which was the emblem of my oldest forebears, whose fields were made fertile by its light. Is it not truth that a man may uplift his spirit even to the footstool of the One among the gods by *bahkti*—faith?"

While the watchers gazed, some frowning, some admiring, Abdul Dost touched the arm of Khlit and nodded approvingly.

"An infidel," he whispered, "but—by the ninety-nine holy names—a man of faith."

Nagir Jan drew his robe closer about him, and spoke pityingly.

"Blind!" he accused. "Does not the god dwell in the temple?"

"Then," responded Matap Rao, "whose dwelling is the world?"

He pointed at the priest.

"What avails it to wash your mouth, to mutter prayers on the pilgrimage if there is no faith in your heart, Nagir Jan? For my faith, you seek to destroy me, to gain the lands of Thaneswar. And so, you have asked Retha as the bride of Jagannath."

The shaven head of the priest drew back with the swift motion of a snake about to strike. But Matap Rao spoke before him.

"Well you know, Nagir Jan, that I will not yield Retha. If it means my death, Retha will not go to the temple."

"Thus you defy the choice of Jagannath?"

"Aye," said Matap Rao, and his voice shook. "For I know what few know. Among the ruins will the bride of Jagannath remain tomorrow night—where you and those who believe with you have said

the god will appear as a man and foretell the omens, in the mystery of *Janam*. But he who will come to the woman is no god but a man, chosen by lot among the priests —perhaps you, Nagir Jan."

His tense face flushed darkly. He lowered his voice, but in the silence it could be heard clearly.

"The rite of *Janam* will be performed. But a *man* violates the body of the bride. It is a priest. And he prophesies the omens. That is why, O Nagir Jan, I have called the priests false.

"Never will the Lotus Face become the bride of Jagannath," he added quietly.

"Impious! Idolator!"

The head of Nagir Jan shot forward with each word.

"It is a lie, spoken in madness. But the madness will not save you."

His eyes shone cruelly, and his teeth drew back from the lips.

"You have blasphemed Jagannath, O Rawul. You have denied to Jagannath his bride."

He turned swiftly.

"Thaneswar is accursed. Who among you will linger here? Who will come with me to serve Jagannath? The god will claim his bride. Wo to those who aid him not——"

He passed swiftly from the hall and a full half of the peasants as well as many of the house servants slipped after him. The soldiers around the Rawul stood where they were.

Rawul Matap Rao gazed after the fugitives with a wry smile. Old Perwan Singh laid down his *vina* and girded a sword-belt about his bony frame. Serwul Jain drew his simitar and flung the scabbard away.

"The battle-storm is at the gate of Thaneswar," he cried in his high voice. "Ho—who will shed his blood for the Lotus Face? You have heard the words of your lord."

A hearty shout from the companion nobles answered him, echoed by a gruffer acclaim from the soldiery, led by Sawal Das. Matap Rao's eyes lighted but his smile was sad.

"Aye, blood will be shed," he murmured. "It is pollution—yet we who die will not bear the stain of the sin."

He laid an arm across the bent shoulder of the minstrel.

"Even thus you foretold, old singer of epics. Will you sing also of the fate of Thaneswar?"

Abdul Dost spoke quickly to Khlit of what had passed. His face was alight with the excitement of conflict. But the shaggy face of Khlit showed no answering gleam.

"There will be good sword-blows, O wayfarer," cried the Moslem. "Come, here is a goodly company. We will scatter the rout of temple-scum! *Eh!*—what say you?"

Khlit remained passive, wearing every indication of strong disgust.

"Why did not yonder stripling chieftain prepare the castle for siege?" he growled.

"Dog of the devil—he did naught but speak words."

He remained seated where he was while Abdul Dost ran to join the forces mustering under Serwul Jain at the castle gate. He shook his head moodily.

But as the Rawul, armed and clad in mail, passed by, Khlit reached up and plucked his sleeve.

"Where, O chieftain," he asked bluntly, "is Asil Rumi, defender of Thaneswar? He is yet armored—aye—the elephants are your true citadel——"

Not understanding Mogholi, and impatient of the strange warrior's delay, the Rawul shook him off and passed on. Khlit looked after him aggrievedly.

Then he shook his wide shoulders, yawned, girded his belt tighter and departed on a quest for good among the remnants of the banquet. It was Khlit's custom, whenever possible, to eat before embarking on any dangerous enterprise.

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And they paused to harken to a voice which said, "Hasten."

It was the voice of the assembler of men, of him who spies out a road for many, who goes alone to the mighty waters. It was Yama, the Lord of Death, and he said:

"Hasten to thy home, and to thy fathers."

NAGIR JAN was not seen again at Thaneswar that night. But his followers heard his tidings and a multitude gathered on the road.

Those who accompanied the Brahman from the hall could give only an incoherent account of the words Matap Rao had spoken. The crowd, however, had been aroused by the priests in the temple.

It was enough for them that the Rawul

had blasphemed against the name of Jagannath. They were stirred by religious zeal, at the festival of the god.

Moreover, as in all mobs, the lawless element coveted the chance to despoil the castle. Among the worshipers were many, well armed, who assembled merely for the prospect of plunder. They joined forces with the more numerous party.

The ranks of the pilgrims and worshipers who had been sent down from the temple by the Brahmans was swelled by an influx of villagers and peasants from the fields—ignorant men who followed blindly those of higher caste.

The higher priests absented themselves, but several of the lower orders such as Kurral directed the onset against the castle. Already the enclosure was surrounded. Torches blazed in the fields without the mud wall. The wall itself was easily surmounted at several points before the garrison could muster to defend it—even if they had been numerous enough to do so.

"Jagannath!" cried the pilgrims, running toward the central garden, barehanded and aflame with zeal, believing that they were about to avenge a mortal sin on the part of one who had scorned the gods.

"Jagannath!" echoed the vagrants and mercenary soldiers, fingering their weapons, eyes burning with the lust of spoil.

"The bride of Jagannath!" shouted the priests among the throng. "Harm her not, but slay all who defend her."

Torches flickered through the enclosure and in the garden. Frightened stable servants fled to the castle, or huddled among the beasts. The neighing of startled horses was drowned by the trumpeting of the elephants. A mahout who drew his weapon was cut down by the knives of the peasants.

But it was toward the palace that the assailants pressed through the pleasure garden; and the palace was ill designed for defense. Wide doorways and latticed arbors guided the mob to the entrances. The clash of steel sounded in the uproar, and the shrill scream of a wounded woman pierced it like a knife-blade.

The bright moon outlined the scene clearly.

Khlit, standing passive within the main hall, could command at once a balcony overlooking the gardens and the front gate. He saw several of the rushing mob fall as the archers in the house launched their shafts.

A powerful blacksmith, half-naked, appeared on the balcony, whither he had climbed, dagger between his teeth. A loyal peasant rushed at him with a sickle, and paused at arm's reach.

"Jagannath!" shouted the giant, stepping forward.

The coolie shrank back and tossed away his makeshift weapon, crying loudly for mercy. He stilled his cry at a melodious voice.

"Chaitanya! Child of the sun!"

It was old Perwan Singh, walking tranquilly along the tiles of the gallery in the full moonlight. The smith hesitated, then advanced to meet him, crouching. The minstrel struck down the dagger awkwardly with his sword. Meanwhile the recalcitrant peasant had crept behind him, and with a quick jerk wrested away the blade.

Perwan Singh lifted his arm, throwing back his head. He did not try to flee. The black giant surveyed him, teeth agrin, and, with a grunt, plunged his dagger into the old man's neck. Both he and the coolie grasped the minstrel's body before it could fall, stripping the rich gold bangles from arms and ankles of their victim and tearing the pearls from his turban-folds.

Before they could release the body an arrow whizzed through the air, followed swiftly by another. The giant coughed and flung up his arms, falling across the body of the coolie. The three forms lay on the tiles, their limbs moving weakly.

Sawal Das, fitting a fresh shaft to string, trotted by along the balcony, peering out into the garden.

The rush of the mob had by now resolved itself into a hand-to-hand struggle at every door to the castle. The blood-lust, once aroused, stilled all other feelings except that of fanatic zeal. Unarmed men grappled with each other, who had worked side by side in the fields the day before.

A woman slave caught up a javelin and thrust at the assailants, screaming the while. For the most part the house-servants had remained loyal to Matap Rao, whom they loved.

By now, however, all within the castle were struggling for their lives. A soldier slew the woman, first catching her ill-aimed weapon coolly on his shield. Khlit saw a second woman borne off by the peasants.

At the main gate the disciplined defenders under Matap Rao, aided well by that excellent swordsman, Abdul Dost, had beaten

off the onset. Serwul Jain and several of the younger nobles had been ordered to safeguard Retha.

They stood in the rear of the main hall, the girl tranquil and proud, her face unveiled, her eyes following Matap Rao in the throng. The Rawul, by birth of the Kayasth or student caste, proved himself a brave man although unskilled.

It was when the first assault had been beaten off and the defenders were gaining courage that the crackle of flames was heard.

Agents of the priesthood among the mob had devoted their attention to firing the thatch roof at the corners. Matap Rao sent bevies of house servants up to the terraces on the roof, but the flames gained. A shout proclaimed the triumph of the mob.

"Jagannath!" they cried. "The god claims his bride."

"Lo," screamed a pilgrim, "the fire spirits aid us. The *daevas* aid us."

Panic, that nemesis of ill-disciplined groups, seized on many slaves and peasants who were in the castle.

"Thaneswar burns!" cried a woman, wringing her hands.

"The gods have doomed us!" muttered a stout coolie, fleeing down the hall.

Serwul Jain sprang aside to cut him down.

"Back, dogs!" shouted the boy. "Death is without."

"*Aie!* We will yield our bodies to Jagannath," was the cry that greeted him.

"Jagannath!"

Those outside caught up the cry.

"Yield to the god."

The backbone of the defense was broken. Slaves threw down their arms. A frightened tide surged back and forth between the rooms. A Brahman appeared in the hall and ran toward Retha silently. A noble at her side stepped between, taking the rush of the priest on his shield.

But the Brahman's fall only dispirited the slaves the more.

KHLIT saw groups of half naked coolies climbing into the windows — the wide windows that served to cool Thaneswar in the Summer heat. He walked down the hall, looking for Abdul Dost.

He saw the thinned body of soldiers at the gate struggle and part before the press of attackers. Then Bhimal, who had remained crouched beside him during the earlier fight, started up and ran, limping, at Serwul Jain.

"Jagannath!" cried the peasant hoarsely. "My brother's god."

He grappled with the noble from behind and flung him to the stone floor. Coolies darted upon the two and sank their knives into the youth. Bhimal stood erect, his eyes staring in frenzy.

"Jagannath conquers!" he shouted.

Khlit caught a glimpse of Matap Rao in a press of men. He turned in time to see Retha's guards hemmed in by a rush of the mob, their swords wrested from their hands.

Retha was seized by many hands before she could lift a simitar that she had caught up against herself. Seeing this and the agony in the girl's face, Khlit hesitated.

But those who held the wife of the Rawul were too many for one man to encounter. He turned aside, down a passage that led toward the main gate.

He had seen Abdul Dost and Matap Rao fight loose from the men who caught at them.

Then for a long space smoke descended upon the chambers of Thaneswar from the smoldering thatch. The cries of the hurt and the wailing of the women were drowned in a prolonged shout of triumph.

The Rawul and Abdul Dost, who kept at his side, sought fruitlessly through the passages for Retha. Those who met them stepped aside at sight of their bloodied swords and stern faces. They followed the cries of a woman out upon the garden terrace, only to find that she was a slave in the hands of the coolies.

Matap Rao, white-faced, would have gone back into the house, but the Moslem held him by sheer strength.

"It avails not, my lord," he said gruffly. "Let us to horse and then we may do something."

The chieftain, dazed by his misfortune, followed the tall Afghan toward the stables, which so far had escaped the notice of the mob, bent on the richer plunder of the castle. Here they met Khlit walking composedly toward them, leading his own pony and the Arab of Abdul Dost, fully saddled.

"Tell the stripling," growled Khlit, "that his palace is lost. Retha I saw in the hands of the priests. They will guard her from the mob. Come."

He led them in the direction of the

elephant-stockade. He had noted that morning that a gate offered access to the elephants' pool. Avoiding one or two of the great beasts who were trampling about the place, leaderless and uneasy, he came upon a man who ran along the stockade bearing a torch.

It was Sawal Das, bow in hand. The archer halted at sight of his lord.

"I had a thought to seek for Asil Rumi," he cried. "But the largest of the elephants is gone with his mahout. *Aie*—heavy is my sorrow. My lord, my men are slain——"

"Come!" broke in Abdul Dost. "We can do naught in Thaneswar."

Even then, loath by hereditary custom to turn their backs on a foe, the chieftain and his archer would have lingered helplessly. But Abdul Dost took their arms and drew them forward.

"Would you add to the triumph of Nagir Jan?" he advised coolly. "There be none yonder but the dead and those who have gone over to the side of the infidel priests.

"This old warrior is in the right. He has seen many battles. We be four men, armed, with two horses. Better that than dead."

A shout from the garden announced that they had been seen. This decided the archer, who tossed his torch to the ground and ran outward through the stockade and the outer wall.

Avoiding their pursuers in the shadows, they passed by the pool into the wood beyond the fields. Here a freshly beaten path opened before them. Sawal Das trotted ahead until all sounds of pursuit had dwindled. Then they halted, eying each other in silence.

Matap Rao leaned against a horse, the sweat streaming from his face. His slender shoulders shook. Khlit glanced at him, then fell to studying the ground under their feet.

Sawal Das unstrung his bow and counted the arrows in his quiver.

"Enough," he remarked grimly, "to send as gifts into the gullets of the Snake and his Kurral. They will not live to see Retha placed upon the car of Jagannath. I swear it."

Abdul Dost grunted.

Matap Rao raised his head and they fell silent.

"In the fall of my house and the loss of my wife," he said bitterly, "lies my honor. Fool that I was to bring Retha to Thaneswar when Nagir Jan had set his toils about it. I can not face the men of Rinthambur."

"Rinthambur!" cried Abdul Dost. "Ho—that is a good word. The hard-fighting clan will aid us, nothing loath—aye, and swiftly. Look you, on these two horses we may ride there——"

"Peace!" said the Rawul calmly. "Think you, soldier, I would ride to Rinthambur when they still hold the wedding feast, and say that Retha has been taken from me?"

"What else?" demanded the blunt Afghan. "By Allah—would you see the Lotus Face fall to Jagannath? In a day and a night we may ride thither and back. With the good clan of Rinthambur at our heels. *Eh*—they wield the swords to teach these priests a lesson——"

"Nay, it would be too late."

"When does the procession of the god——"

"Just before sunset the car of Jagannath is dragged to the ruins."

"Then," proposed the archer, "if Vishnu favors us we may attack—we four—and slay many. Twilight will cover our movement near the ruins. Aye, perchance we can muster some following among the near-by peasants.

"Then will we provide bodies in very truth for the car of Jagannath to roll upon. From this hour am I no longer a follower of the All-Destroyer——"

Matap Rao smiled wanly.

"So have I not been for many years, Sawal Das. My faith is that of the Rinthambur clan, who are called children of the sun. I worship the One Highest. Yet what has it availed me?"

He turned as Khlit came up. The Cossack had lent an attentive ear to the speech of the archer. He had completed his study of the trail wherein they stood. He swaggered as he walked forward—a fresh alertness in his gaunt figure.

"It is time," he said, "that we took counsel together as wise men and as warriors. The time for folly is past."

ABDUL DOST and Sawal Das, nothing loath, seated themselves on their cloaks upon the ground already damp with the night dew. Matap Rao remained as he was, leaning against the horse in full moonlight notwithstanding the chance of discovery by a stray pursuer.

The mesh of cypress and fern branches overhead cast mottled shadows on the group. The moon was well in the west and

the moist air of early morning hours chilled the perspiration with which the four were soaked. They drew their garments about them and waited, feeling the physical quietude that comes upon the heels of forcible exertion.

Khlit, deep in the shadows, called to Sawal Das softly.

"What see you here in the trail?" he questioned. "This is not a path made by men, nor is it a buffalo-track leading to water."

The archer bent forward.

"True," he acknowledged. "It is the trail of elephants. One at least has passed."

He felt of the broad spoor.

"Siva—none but Asil Rumi, largest of the Thaneswar herd, could have left these marks. They are fresh."

"Asil Rumi," continued Khlit from the darkness. "It is as I thought. Tell me, would the oldest elephant have fled without his rider?"

"Nay. Asil Rumi is schooled in war. He is not to be frightened. Only will he flee where his mahout leads. Without the man Asil Rumi would have stayed."

"This mahout—is he true man or traitor?"

"True man to the Rawul. It is his charge to safeguard the elephant. He must seek to lead Asil Rumi into hiding in the jungle."

"A good omen."

Satisfaction for the first time was in the voice of the Cossack.

"Now may we plan. Abdul Dost, have you a thought as to how we may act?"

The Moslem meditated.

"We will abide with the Rawul. We have taken his quarrel upon us. He may have a thought to lead us into the temple this night, while the slaves of Jagannath sleep and the plundering engages the multitude——"

"Vain," broke in the archer. "The priests hold continued festival. The temple wall is too high to climb and the guards are alert. Retha will be kept within the sanctuary of the idols, under the gold dome where no man may come but a priest.

"The only door to the shrine is through the court of offerings, across the place of dancing, and through the audience hall——"

"Even so," approved Khlit. "Now is it the turn of Sawal Das. He has already spoken well."

"My thought is this," explained the archer. "There will be great shouting and confusion when the sacred car is led from the temple gate. A mixed throng will seek to draw the car by the ropes and to push at the many wheels.

"We may cover our armor with common robes and hide our weapons, disguising our faces. Men from the outlying districts will aid us, for they are least tainted by the poisonous breath of the Snake——"

"Not so," objected the Afghan, ill pleased at the archer's refusal of his own plan. "Time lacks for the gathering of an adequate force. Those who were most faithful to the Rawul have suffered their heads and hands cut off and other defects.

"Besides, the mastery of Thaneswar has passed to the Snake. When would peasants risk their lives in a desperate venture? *Eh*—when fate has decreed against them?"

"Justly spoken," said Khlit bluntly. "Sawal Das, you and the Rawul might perchance conceal your likeness, but the heavy bones of Abdul Dost and myself—they would reveal us in the throng. It may not be."

"What then?" questioned the archer fiercely. "Shall we watch like frightened women while this deed of shame is done?"

"Has the chieftain a plan?" asked Khlit.

Matap Rao lifted his head wearily.

"Am I a warrior?" he said calmly. "The Rinthambur warriors have a saying that a sword has no honor until drawn in battle for a just cause. This night has brought me dishonor. There is no path for me except a death at the hands of the priests——"

"Not so," said Khlit.

The others peered into the shadows, trying to see his face.

"You have all spoken," continued the Cossack. "I have a plan that may gain us Retha. Will you hear it?"

"Speak," said Abdul Dost curiously.

"The temple may not be entered. The multitude of worshipers is too great for the assault of few men. Then must the chieftain and Abdul Dost ride to Rinthambur as speedily as may be."

"And Retha?" questioned the Rawul.

"Sawul Das and I will fetch the woman from the priests and go to meet you, so that your swords may cover our flight."

Matap Rao laughed shortly. To him the rescue of Retha seemed a thing impossible.

"Is my honor so debased that I would

leave my bride to the chance of rescue at other hands?"

Whereupon Abdul Dost rose and went to his side respectfully. He laid a muscular hand on the shoulder of the youth.

"My lord," he said slowly, "your misfortune has befallen because of the evil craft of men baser and shrewder than you. Allah—you are but a new-weaned boy in experience of combat. You are a reader of books.

"Yet this man called the Curved Saber is a planner of battles. He has had a rank higher than yours. He has led a hundred thousand swords. His hair is gray, and it was said to me not once but many times that he is very shrewd.

"It is no dishonor to follow his leadership. I have not yet seen him in battle, but I have heard what I have heard."

The Rawul was silent for a space. Then, "Speak," he said to Khlit.

While they listened Khlit told them what was in his mind, in few words. He liked not to talk of his purpose. He spoke to ease the trouble of the boy.

When he had done Sawal Das and Abdul Das looked at each other.

"*Bismillah!*" cried the Afghan. "It is a bold plan. What! Think you I would ride to Rinthambur and leave you—Khlit—to act thus?"

"Aye," said the Cossack dryly. "There is room for two men in my venture; no more. Likewise two should ride to the rajas, for one man might fail or be slain——"

Matap Rao peered close into Khlit's bearded face.

"The greater danger lies here," he said. "You would take your life in your open hand. How can I ask this of you?"

Khlit grunted, for such words were ever to his distate.

"I would strike a blow for Retha," he responded, but he was thinking of Nagir Jan.

His words stirred the injured pride of the Hindu.

"By the gods!" he cried. "Then shall I stay with you."

"Nay, my lord. Will the chieftains of Rinthambur raise their standard and mount their riders for war on the word of a stranger—a Moslem? So that they will believe, you must go," adding in his beard, "and be out of my way."

So it happened before moonset that Abdul Dost and the Rawul mounted and rode swiftly to the west through paths known to the chieftain.

At once Khlit and Sawal Das set forth upon the spoor of Asil Rumi, which led north toward the farm of Bhimal. Now as he went the little archer fell to humming under his breath. It was the first time he had sung in many hours.

VI

WHEN the shadows lengthened in the courtyard of the temple of Kukushetra the next day a long cry went up from the multitude. From the door under the wheel and flag of Vishnu came a line of priests.

First came the strewers of flowers, shedding lotus-blossoms, jasmine and roses in the path that led to the car of Jagannath. The bevy of dancing women thronged after them, chattering excitedly. But their shrill voices were drowned in the steady, passionate roar that went up from the throng.

The temple prostitutes no longer drew the eyes of the pilgrims. Their task in arousing the desires of the men was done. Now it was the day of Jagannath, the festival of the *Janam*.

Bands of priests emerged from the gate, motioning back the people. A solid wall of human beings, straining for sight of the god, packed the temple enclosure and stretched without the gates. A deeply religious, almost frenzied mass, waiting for the great event of the year, which was the passage of the god to his country seat—as the older ruined temple was termed.

A louder acclaim greeted the appearance of the grotesque wooden form of the god, borne upon the shoulders of the Brahmans. The figure of Jagannath was followed by that of the small Balabhadra, brother to the god, and Subhadra, his sister.

Jagannath was carried to his car. This was a complicated wooden edifice, put together by reverent hands—a car some fifteen yards long and ten yards wide, and lofty. Sixteen broad wooden wheels, seven feet high, supported the mass. A series of platforms, occupied by the women of the temple, hung with garlands of flowers and with offerings to the god, led up to a wide seat wherein was placed Jagannath.

This done, those nearest the car laid hold of the wheels and the long ropes, ready to

begin the famous journey. The smaller cars of Balabhadra and Subhadra received less attention and fewer adherents.

Was not Jagannath Lord of the World, chief among the gods, and divine bringer of prosperity during the coming year? So the Brahmans had preached, and the people believed. Had not their fathers believed before them?

The decorators of the idols had robed Jagannath in costly silk and fitted false arms to the wooden body so that it might be sightly in the eyes of the multitude.

The cries of the crowd grew louder and the ropes attached to the car tautened with a jerk. A flutter of excitement ran through the gathering. Had they not journeyed for many days to be with Jagannath on the *Janam?*

As always in a throng, the nearness of so many of their kind wrought upon them. Religious zeal was at a white heat. But the Brahmans raised their hands, cautioning the worshipers.

"The bride of Jagannath comes!" they cried.

"Way for the bride of the god!" echoed the pilgrims.

The door of the temple opened again and Retha appeared, attended by some of the women of the wardrobe. The girl's slim form had been elaborately robed. Her cheeks were painted, her long hair allowed to fall upon her shoulders and back.

A brief silence paid tribute to the beauty of the woman. She glanced once anxiously about the enclosure; then her eyes fell, nor did she look up when she was led to a seat beside and slightly below the image of the god.

Once she was seated the guardians who had watched her throughout the night stepped aside. In the center of the crowd of worshipers Retha was cut off from her kind, as securely the property of the god as if she still stood in the shrine. For no one among the throng but was a follower of Jagannath, in the zenith of religious excitement.

The priests formed a cordon about the car. Hundreds of hands caught up the ropes. A blare of trumpets from the musicians on the car, and it lurched forward, the great wheels creaking.

"Honor to Jagannath!" screamed the voice of Bhimal. "The god is among us. Let me touch the wheels!"

The machine was moving forward more steadily now, the wheels churning deep into the sand. The pullers sweated and groaned, tasting keen delight in the toil; the throng crushed closer. A woman cried out, and fainted.

But those near her did not give back. Instead they set their feet upon her body and pressed forward. Was it not true blessedness to die during the passage of Jagannath?

Contrary to many tales, they did not throw themselves under the wheels. Only one man did this, and he wracked with the pain of leprosy and sought a holy death, cleansed of his disease.

Perhaps in other days numbers had done this. But now many died in the throng, what with the heat and pressure and the strain of the excitement, which had continued now for several days.

SLOWLY the car moved from the temple enclosure, into the streets of the village, out upon the highway that led to its destination. The sun by now was descending to the horizon.

But the ardor of the pilgrims waxed higher as the god continued its steady progress. For the car to halt would be a bad omen. And the dancing women, stimulated by *bhang*, shouted and postured on the car, flinging their thin garments to those below and gesturing with nude bodies in a species of frenetic exaltation.

Those pushing the car from behind shouted in response. The eyes of Nagir Jan, walking among the pilgrims, gleamed. Kurral, crouched on the car, had ceased to watch the quiet form of Retha.

Rescue now, he thought, was impossible, as was any attempt on her part to escape. For the car was surrounded the space of a long bow-shot on every side.

The wind which had fluttered the garlands on the car died down as the shadows lengthened. The leaders of the crowd were already within sight of the shrine whither they were bound.

Retha sat as one lifeless. Torn from the side of her husband and carried from the hall of Thaneswar, she had been helpless in the hands of the priests. A proud woman, accustomed to the deference shown to the clan of Rinthambur, the misfortune had numbed her at first.

Well knowing what Matap Rao knew of

the evil rites of Jagannath, to be exhibited to the crowd of worshipers caused her to flush under the paint which stained her cheeks.

She would have cast herself down from the car if she had not known that the Brahmans would have forced her again into the seat. To be handled by such a mob was too great a shame.

She had heard that Matap had escaped alive the night before. One thought kept up her courage. Not without an effort to save her would the Rawul allow her to reach the shrine where the rites of that night were to take place.

This she knew, and she hugged the slight comfort of that hope to her heart. Rawul Matap Rao would not abandon her. But, seeing the number of the throng, even this hope dwindled.

How could the chieftain reach her side? But he would ride into the throng, she felt, and an arrow from his bow would free her from shame.

At a sudden silence which fell upon the worshipers she lifted her head for the first time.

Coming from the shrine of the elder gods she saw a massive elephant, appareled for war, an armored plate on his chest, sword-blades fastened to his tusks, his ears and trunk painted a bright orange and leather sheets strapped to his sides. And, seeing, she gave a low cry.

"Asil Rumi!"

The elephant was advancing more swiftly than it seemed at first, his great ears stretched out, his small eyes shifting. On his back was the battle howdah. Behind his head perched the mahout wearing a shirt of mail. In the howdah were two figures that stared upon the crowd.

Asil Rumi advanced, interested, even excited, by the throng of men. Schooled to warfare, he followed obediently the instructions of his native master, scenting something unwonted before him. Those nearest gave back hastily.

For a space the throng believed that the elephant was running amuck. Never before had man or beast interfered with the progress of the god. But as Asil Rumi veered onward and the leading pullers at the ropes were forced to scramble aside an angry murmur went up.

Then the voice of Kurral rang out.

"Infidels!" he cried. "Those upon the elephant are men of Matap Rao."

The murmur increased to a shout, in which the shrill cries of the women mingled.

"Blasphemers! Profaners of Jagannath! Slay them!"

Nagir Jan raised his arms in anger.

"Defend the god!" he shouted. "Turn the elephant aside."

Already some men had thrust at Asil Rumi with sticks and spears. The elephant rumbled deep within his bulk. His wrinkled head shook and tossed. His trunk lifted and his eyes became inflamed. He pushed on steadily.

A priest stepped into his path and slashed at his trunk with a dagger.

Asil Rumi switched his trunk aside, and smote the man with it. The priest fell back, his skull shattered. A soldier cast a javelin which clanged against the animal's breast-plate.

Angered, the elephant rushed the man, caught him in his trunk and cast him under-foot. A huge foot descended on the soldier, and the man lay where he had fallen, a broken mass of bones from which oozed blood.

Now Asil Rumi trumpeted fiercely. He tasted battle and glanced around for a fresh foe.

The bulk of the towering car caught his eye. With a quick rush the elephant pressed between the ropes, moving swiftly for all his size and weight.

The clamor increased. Men dashed at the beast, seeking to penetrate his armor with their weapons; but more hung back. For from on the howdah a helmeted archer had begun to discharge arrows that smote down the leaders of the crowd. The mahout prodded Asil Rumi forward.

The elephant, nothing loath, placed his armored head full against the car. For a moment the pressure of the crowd behind the wooden edifice impelled it against the animal. Asil Rumi uttered a harsh, grating cry and bent his legs into the ground.

He leaned his weight against the car. The wooden wheels of Jagannath creaked, then turned loosely in the sand. The car of the god had stopped. A shout of dismay went up.

Then the mahout tugged with his hook at the head of Asil Rumi. Obedient, even in his growing anger inflamed by minor wounds, the elephant placed one forefoot on the shelving front of the car. The rudely constructed wood gave way and the mass

of the car sank with a jar upon the ground, broken loose from the support of the front wheels.

By now the mob was fully aroused. Arrows and javelins flew against the leather protection of the animal and his leather-like skin, wrinkled and aged to the hardness of rhinoceros hide.

A shaft struck the leg of the native mahout and a spear caught in his groin under the armor. He shivered, but retained his seat. Seeing this, Khlit clambered over the front of the howdah to the man's side.

"Make the elephant kneel!" he cried.

Asil Rumi knelt, and the fore part of the car splintered under the weight of two massive knees. It fell lower. Now Asil Rumi was passive for a brief moment, and Sawal Das redoubled his efforts, seeking to prevent the priests with knives from hamstringing the beast.

"Come, Retha!" cried Khlit, kneeling and holding fast to the head-band beside the failing native.

The woman was now on a level with him. She understood not his words, but his meaning was plain. The shock to the car had dislodged many of the men upon it.

The temple women clutched at her, but she avoided them. She poised her slender body for the leap.

"Slay the woman!" cried Kurral, scrambling toward her.

A powerful Bhil perched beside the head of the elephant and slashed once with his simitar. The blow half-severed the mahout's head from the body. Before he could strike again Khlit had knocked him backward.

Retha sprang forward, and the Cossack caught her with his free arm, drawing back as Kurral leaped, knife in hand. The priest missed the woman. The next instant his body slipped back, a feathered shaft from the bow of Sawal Das projecting from his chest.

"Ho—Kurral—your death is worthy of you," chanted the archer. "Gully jackal, scavenger dog——"

His voice trailed off in a gurgle. And Khlit and the girl were flung back against the howdah. Asil Rumi, maddened by his wounds and no longer hearing the voice of his master, started erect.

He tossed his great head, reddened with blood. His trumpeting changed to a hoarse scream. The knives of his assailants had hurt him sorely.

The sword-blades upon the tusks had been broken off against the car. The leather armor was cut and slashed. Spears, stuck in the flanks of the elephant, acted as irritants. His trunk—a most sensitive member—was injured, and his neck bleeding.

While Khlit and Retha clung beside the body of the mahout Asil Rumi shrilled his anger at the throng of his enemies. He broke crashing from the ruins of the car wherein lay the unattended figure of Jagannath, and plunged into the crowd. Weaving his head—its paint besmirched by blood—Asil Rumi raced forward.

He rushed onward until no more of his tormentors stood in his path. Then the elephant hesitated, and headed toward the trail up the hill which led down to his quarters at Thaneswar.

"Harken," said a weak voice from the howdah.

Khlit peered up and saw the archer's face strangely pale.

"Asil Rumi will run," said Sawal Das, "until he sees the body of the native fall. Hold the mahout firmly."

A few foot soldiers had run after the elephant in a half-hearted fashion. There were no horsemen in the crowd, and few cared to follow the track of the great beast afoot. Asil Rumi had struck terror into the worshipers.

His appearance and the devastation he had wrought had been that of no ordinary elephant. Among the Hindus lingered the memory of the elder gods of the ruins from which Asil Rumi had so abruptly emerged. And some among them reflected that Vishnu, highest of the gods, bore an elephant head.

So had the deaths inflicted by Asil Rumi stirred their fears.

The sun had set, and the crimson of the western sky was fading to purple. The calm of twilight hung upon the forest through which Asil Rumi paced, following the trail. A flutter of night birds arose at his presence, and a prowling leopard slunk away at the angry mutter of the elephant, knowing that Asil Rumi was enraged and that an angry elephant was monarch of whatsoever path he chose to follow.

Again came the voice of Sawal Das, weaker now.

"My heart is warm that the Lotus Face is saved for my lord," it said—neither Khlit

nor the girl dared to look up from their precarious perch where the branches of overhanging cypresses swept.

"An arrow—" the voice failed—"tell the Rawul how Sawul Das fought—for my spirit goes after the mahout——"

A moment later a branch caught the howdah and swept it to earth. Retha and Khlit clung tighter to the head-straps, pressing their bodies against the broad back of Asil Rumi. Khlit did not release his grasp on the dead native.

The wind of their passage swept past their ears; the labored breath of the old elephant smote their nostrils pungently. Ferns scraped their shoulders. They did not look up.

It was dark by now, and still Asil paced onward.

DAWN was breaking and a warm wind had sprung up when Matap Rao and Abdul Dost with the leaders of the Rinthambur clan passed the boundary tower of Thaneswar. A half-thousand armed men followed them, but few were abrest of them, for they had ridden steadily throughout the night, not sparing their horses.

Dawn showed the anxious chieftain the unbroken stretch of the Thaneswar forest through which he had passed on his bridal journey. He did not look at those with him, but pressed onward.

So it happened that Rawul Matap Rao and two of the best mounted of the Rinthambur riders were alone when they emerged into a glade where a path from Thaneswar crossed the main trail. And here they reined in their spent horses with a shout.

In the path lay the body of a native. Over the dead man stood the giant elephant, caked with mud and dried blood, his small eyes closed and his warlike finery stained and torn. And beside the elephant stood Khlit and Retha.

WHAT followed was swift in coming to pass. After a brief embrace the Rawul left his bride to be escorted back to Rinthambur by Khlit and Abdul Dost at the head of a detail of horsemen while he and the Rinthambur men wrested Thaneswar from the priests.

It was a different matter this, from the assault upon the palace by Nagir Jan, and the followers of the temple were forced to give way before the onset of trained warriors.

The religous fervor of the Kukushetra men had suffered by the misfortune that befel their god before the ruins, and the fighting was soon at an end.

But it was not until Matap Rao was again in Thaneswar with Retha that Khlit and Abdul Dost turned their horses' heads from the palace. Peace had fallen upon the province again, for Matap Rao had sent a message to the shrine of Puri, and the high priests of Vishnu, among whom the ambitions of Nagir Jan had found no favor, had judged that Nagir Jan had made wrong use of his power and sent another to be head of the Kukushetra temple.

"Aye, and men whispered that there was a tale that the mad beast of the ruins was the incarnate spirit of an older god," laughed Abdul Dost, who wore new finery of armor and rode a fine horse—the Rawul had been generous. "Such are the fears of fools and infidels."

Khlit, who rode his old pony, tugged his beard, his eyes grave.

"It was not the false gods," he said decidedly, "that saved Matap Rao his wife. It was verily a warrior—an old warrior. But how can the Rawul reward him.

Abdul Dost glanced at Khlit curiously.

"Nay," he smiled; "you are the one. You are a leader of men, even of the Rawul and his kind—as I said to them. Belittle not the gratitude of the chieftain. He would have kept you at his right hand, in honor. But you will not."

"Because I am not the one.

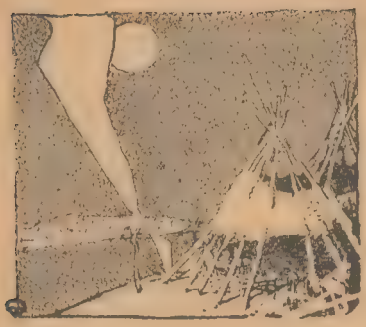
"Sawal Das?"

"Somewhat perhaps."

Khlit's voice roughened and his eyes became moody.

"Asil Rumi is the one. Truly never have I seen a fighter such as he. Yet Asil Rumi is old. Soon he will die. Where is his reward?"

Whereupon Khlit shook his broad shoulders, tightened his rein and broke into a gallop. Abdul Dost frowned, pondering. He shook his handsome head. Then his brow cleared and he spurred after his friend.



THE CAMP-FIRE

A Meeting-Place for Readers, Writers and Adventurers

WITH the opening of his new serial in this issue Hugh Pendexter gives us of Camp-Fire some interesting facts about the times in which the story is laid. As you know already, Mr. Pendexter's stories are more than stories. They're education—the rare kind of education that's pleasant in the getting and the most worth while when got. What most school books do to American history is a sin and a shame. And a bore. Perhaps most of us, as children and adults, have a natural interest in history and a real liking for it. A dose of school history and school histories generally kills at least part of that interest. Mr. Pendexter gives us, first of all, stories, but with them and in them he gives us real history—the living, breathing life of past times.

Norway, Maine.

On the monument erected to James Bridger by Maj. Gen. Grenville M. Dodge is the following inscription:

1804—*James Bridger*—1881.
Celebrated as a hunter, trapper, fur trader and guide.
Discovered Great Salt Lake 1824, *the South Pass* 1827.
Visited Yellowstone Lake and Geysers 1830.
Founded Fort Bridger 1843.
Opened Overland Route by Bridger's Pass to Great Salt Lake.
Was Guide for U. S. Exploring expeditions, Albert Sidney Johnston's army in 1857, *and G. M. Dodge in U. P. surveys, and Indian campaign* 1865-66.

Although his long life was replete with invaluable services, Bridger left no written word of his adventures. Mention in the story of early boyhood, when at the age of ten he bought and operated ferry boat at St. Louis, is a fact. At 13 years of age he was apprenticed to Phil Cromer to learn the blacksmith's trade. At the age of 18 he hired out with Ashley for the Rockey Mountains trip. That expedition went up the Missouri to the Yellowstone and lost a boat loaded with $10,000 worth of goods. The land party keeping abreast of the boats lost their horses to "friendly" Indians. They built a fort at the mouth of the Yellowstone and spent the Winter hunting and exploring. Bridger was at the Aricara village fight in the Spring of 1823, and in August of that year went under command of Andrew Henry back to the Yellowstone, two of the band being killed by Indians on the way.

THIS fort was abandoned that Fall and a new site selected at the mouth of the Powder. Bridger was sent with others to Green River by Etienne Prevost, and discovered South Pass late in the Fall of 1823. The Prevost party trapped the Green, Wind and other streams, and wintered 1823-24 in Cache valley on the Bear River.

How Bridger came to discover the Great Salt Lake is correctly given in the story. And it is also recorded as a fact by Gen. Dodge in his sketch of Bridger that the party believed it an arm of the Pacific till it was further explored in 1825. Ashley sold the Rocky Mountain Fur company in July, 1826, to Smith (Jedediah S.), Jackson & Sublette.

Bridger trapped for them until 1829-30, Kit Carson being his companion that season.

THE first wagons used on the Oregon Trail were those taken out by Sublette in the Spring of 1830. They (ten wagons, five mules to each) left St. Louis April 10th, and arrived at the Wind River rendezvous July 16. The first wheeled vehicle to cross the plains north of the Santa Fé route was Ashley's six-pounder cannon, which he took to Utah Lake in 1826.

In August, 1830, the Rocky Mountain company again changed hands, with Bridger one of the most influential partners. It is supposed that Bridger first saw the Yellowstone Lake and Geyser during this year. He described the wonderful region to every one he talked with, but not until some thirty years later was the region explored.

In the Spring of 1831 Bridger and Sublette started with their outfit for the Blackfoot country and lost their horses to the Crows. This theft despite the fact Bridger was a great friend of the Crows. Bridger recovered the horses and all the Crows' poines to boot.

SILK hats cut the price of beaver down to two dollars a pound. Kit Carson in the Southwest knew the beaver days were over. Jim Bridger also realized it, and the Rocky Mountain Fur Company dissolved in 1834. From 1833 to 1840 Bridger handled trapping parties for the A. F. C. west the Big Horn River. In 1843 he built Fort Bridger on a tributary of the Black Fork of Green River. Here came the trail through Bridger's Pass, both for the overland immigrant and the Mormon,

whether traveling by the North or South Platte routes.

Bridger lived there until 1857, when he leased the property to the United States, the formal lease being signed by Gen. Johnston's quartermaster, the rental being six hundred dollars a year. Gen. Dodge in his sketch of Bridger says none of the rental was ever paid, although thirty years later the Government paid six thousand dollars for "improvements" on the land.

IN 1856 he had much trouble with the Mormons, his buildings being destroyed by fire, and he barely escaping death. He estimated the stock and merchandise of which he was robbed, or otherwise lost, to be of the value of one hundred thousand dollars. In 1850 he settled at Little Santa Fé, Jackson Co., Mo. He spent his Summers on the plains and in the mountains. In 1862 the Government asked him to act as guide in the Indian campaign. In 1865-66 he guided Gen. Conger's column from Fort Laramie to Tongue River. Capt. E. H. Palmer, of that expedition, tells how Bridger saw smoke fifty miles away with naked eye while the general could see nothing with powerful glasses. Two days later Pawnee scouts reported an Indian village on the Tongue, the smoke of which Bridger had claimed to have seen. Capt. Palmer says Bridger remarked, "These —— paper-collar soldiers telling me there wasn't any smoke!"

In 1869 Bridger was guide for Capt. Raynolds, assigned to explore the country around Yellowstone Park. He was with him a year and a half. Bridger died July 17, 1881, 77 years of age. Gen. Dodge says his fame rests on the part he bore in exploring the West, that he had no equal as a guide, that the topography of the whole West was mapped out in his mind, that he could describe and draw an intelligent map of any region he ever visited, even though he visited it but once.

JIM Baker practically lived his life in the mountains with various Indian tribes. He was Illinois born and bid good-by to civilization when eighteen years old. His first employment, according to Inman, was with the A. F. C. He was thoroughly imbued with the superstitions and beliefs of the Indians, overfond of whisky at times, generous to imprudence, unacquainted with the sensation called fear. He was famous as a mountaineer, hunter and trapper, a friend of Carson, Bridger, Wooton, Hobbs, Beckwourth, and many others of the old time mountain men. His views on the Indian, as given in Chapter 7, are quoted by Inman in his "Old Santa Fé Trail." His fight with two half grown grizzly bears is too well known to be more than mentioned.

KENNETH McKENZIE, *the* King of the Missouri, was the greatest trader ever employed by the A. F. C. From the beginning of his ventures in fur-trading John Jacob Astor showed a strong partiality for men who had been taught in the H. B., the N. B., or the X. Y. Z. schools in Canada. McKenzie's opening up the Blackfoot trade through Jacob Berger was a master stroke. While bourgeois at Fort Union he ruled as dictator and was host to several famous travelers, such as Audubon, Catlin (he drew a picture of Fort Union showing three bastions) and Prince Maximilian. McKenzie had James Kipp build Fort McKenzie at the mouth of the Marias, it being the first fort established for the Blackfeet. Gauche fought the Piegans here in August, 1833. The steamer arriving at Fort Union on June 24, 1834, brought an express to McKenzie, announcing Astor's retirement from the A. F. C., Pierre Chouteau, Jr., and Company being his successors. Fort Union was commenced by McKenzie in 1829. His theory was to stop all opposition by breaking and crushing it. In the story I advanced the time of the famous distillery. It was operated in 1833-34.

FATHER DE SMET in his "Western Missions and Missionaries" says of Gauche, "Crafty, cruel, deceitful. A bad Indian in every sense of the word, his life was full of horrors." Charles Larpenteur, who commenced as whisky-clerk at Union and worked up to bourgeois, speaks of him as "This great perverted genius." And says he was infamous as a secret poisoner (see "Forty Years in the Fur Trade").

Fort William, named after William Sublette, was built just below mouth of Yellowstone, two and a half a miles from Fort Union as an Opposition. It lasted a year and was bought out by the A. F. C. Fort Buford was built on this site in 1866 when Fort Union went out of business. Gauche, through some whim, refused to bring his Winter trade to Fort Union the Fall of 1833, but took it to the new fort. There were five hundred Indians and their squaws, all drunk, says Larpenteur, and kept locked in so they could not go to Union. This was the first big chief the Opposition succeeded in getting away from the A. F. C., and this victory, of course, was only a transient one. It was in March, 1836, that Gauche with three hundred warriors jumped thirty lodges of drunken Blackfeet, massacred them and took three hundred ponies. Gauche died at Fort Union in the Autumn of 1843 after being soundly whipped by the Aricaras.

THE Deschamps are worse than I have painted them, and the Rem family no better. Gardepied killed Deschamps at the fort in July 1836. An A. F. C. man took a pipe of peace and made peace between the Deschamps and the Rems, the latter having abetted Gardepied in the killing. In the Fall Rem's two sons-in-law were killed by Blackfeet on Milk River, and the Deschamps family planned revenge on their weakened foes. Old Mother Deschamps urged her sons to avenge the death of their father. They promptly killed old Jack Rem, declared war on his people and also on the whites in Fort Union. Ten of the company's men demanded guns of Larpenteur, and he gave them out, also a cannon. The Deschamps were living in Old Fort William, which had been rebuilt nearer Fort Union. The fight went on all day. Old Mother Deschamps was shot while standing in the door and holding a peace-pipe. François was killed in the bastion, being out of ammunition and suffering from a broken wrist. In all eight of the family were killed. The company lost two men.

PINAUD killed Blair while employed as hunter at Cabanne's Post. He was acquitted, although the murder was deliberate. But the A. F. C. would not send down witnesses as it would reveal their liquor traffic with the Indians. (See Chittenden's "History of Navigation on the Missouri.") I don't know what became of Pinaud, but being a

worthless cuss I've taken the liberty to kill him off.

The most important post on the Missouri from 1812 to 1823 was Fort Lisa, named after its founder, Manuel Lisa, pioneer trader. It was located five miles below the old Council Bluffs, or one mile above Cabanne's.

The Benton-Lucas duels were August 12 and September 27, 1817. The Biddle-Pettis duel was fought at a distance of five feet, Pettis being very near-sighted. This was on August 27, 1831.

The death of the bull from hydrophobia, and the biting of Goerge Holmes by mad wolves, is related by Larpenteur. Alexander Henry in his "Journal" also speaks several times of mad wolves and of their persistency in entering tents.—HUGH PENDEXTER.

ANOTHER old letter out of our pile that is waiting for Camp-Fire. Some of you will remember how, through various comrades, we kept track for a while of the old whaler *Morning Star*. Here she is again in this letter written "somewhere in France" probably toward the end of 1918. In a way, I'm glad I don't try to handle our Camp-Fire letters in the order they're received, not only because it would be more complicated than it seems but because it lends an added interest to dip into our store of letters and lift out one, for example, written back when the whole world was at war.

U. S. A. T. —— ——.

I am quartermaster in U. S. A. T. and a great lover of sailing ships, especially whalers. I saw your article about the old *Morning Star*.

I KNOW the old *Morning Star* well, and I sailed with Captain Arey, an old-timer who sailed in her years ago. At the time I knew her she lay at an old storage dock in Providence, R. I., and I was aboard her, looking round. She was to be used in a motion picture, I heard. Last Summer I saw her in Brooklyn at the Red Hook dock, or near there. She was schooner-rigged (three-masted) and her boat cranes and after deckhouse were gone, but I knew her at once. The name was still painted across the square old stern between the batteries.

I know the *C. W. Morgan*, the *Hicks*, *Bertha*, *Swallow*, *Viola*, *Greyhound* and a few more, and am waiting for the war to knock off so I can go to New Bedford and see the model of the old *Lagoda*. If you print any more articles about the old girls I hope to run foul of them. I see one at sea occasionally, but they don't hang around the steamer tracks much, so a tramp doesn't get to see many.—GEO. A. GALE.

P. S.—I am also a painter of ships and cowpunchers when I'm ashore for a spell (which is not very often) and have painted several whaling scenes, which partly explains my interest in the old-timers. I have been to sea as sailor and quartermaster since November, 1915; so have seen a little deep-water time. Was in the A. H. line running to South America in the *Luckenbach* to Colon, and for the last year have been running across for the Army Transport, carrying stores to the boys *over there*, or *over here* as the case now is.

Have a brother in the army here, "Somewhere in France."—S. A. G.

YOU can't blame this comrade. He's talking about my initials used as signature to most of my letters. Probably I couldn't read 'em myself if I didn't know what they are, but I've already explained why I sign with them and no man can explain why I write so badly. The following letter was written December 7, 1918. Found it as I dug down into a pile of letters to Camp-Fire.

U. S. S. Arkansas.

Now, pard, what's your handle? You just dash a few letters down and Lord only knows what it means. Now the next time you send a line put your handle at the end

You see, we were on a mine-sweeper last week and the crew—near took the long trail. Yes, we were sweeping mines when I spotted one right ahead of us. Talk about your fun! Say, it looked like we were all going up for a minute. Believe me, it's no fun being out here in the wastes of nowhere when you're picking the darn things up. The trenches might be bad, but it hasn't got anything on this outfit.

Well, I'll knock off now, send regards to all the old-timers.—C. F. LESKEALIS (TEXAS CHARLES).

THIS old-timer of the West "comes across" handsomely with pictures of the past for Camp-Fire. Mr. Hooker lives in New York now, editor of the *Erie Railroad Magazine*, but he lived a full life before ever he settled down in the metropolis.

NEW YORK.

Here is something *in re* "Wild Bill," and others.

WHY not get some one who knows the details to tell the story of John Finnerty's ride from the Custer battlefield to a telegraph office? He scooped the world in his report to the old Chicago *Times* (Wilbur F. Storey's paper) and, at that, the news was not published until several days after the battle—nearly the 1st of July, 1876. I think the battle was on June 25th.

I think some of your correspondents hesitate about signing their letters with their real names, for publication, because they feel, as I do, that after the lapse of nearly half a century it is impossible to give correct dates and other facts. I, myself, have discovered that many things are not as clear as they might be. Take "Wild Bill's" marriage, for example: I have always been of the opinion that he married Madam Lake (then the premier woman horseback rider) in Cheyenne or Omaha. However, if I tried to locate the place or the time I'd have to guess.

Madam Lake, in 1876, was with "Cooper & Bailey's Ten Allied Shows in One," which starred Madam Lake. The show played in Omaha, Neb., Red Oak, Mt. Pleasant, Albia, Ottumwa and Burlington, Iowa, that year. It was in Burlington on July 4, 1876, and was caught in a big cyclone that day. Some of its cars were blown off the tracks.

Madam Lake was with the C. & B. show that day, and later, either at Monmouth or Galesburg, Ill., was thrown, her saddle padding slipping. Even the so-called "bareback" riders have a level pad arrangement, sometimes. I don't believe "Wild Bill" was with the show, but it seems to me he had been married to the madam some time before that.

Madam Lake was a wonderful horsewoman, with or without a saddle.

I'm telling you this to show you how time obliterates or twists our minds. I have tried hard to connect a whole lot of events of those old days, but can't do it; consequently I (and no doubt others) hesitate about going into them over our own signatures.

WHEN the C. & B. show was at Albia (Iowa) there was a "hey rube" battle with a gang of miners who tried to pull down the tent. Two or three citizens were killed and Mr. Bailey, I remember, had to go back next year to a trial. If old "Tody" Hamilton was on earth he could—perhaps—tell us all about it, and I am sure could clear up any mystery about "Bill" and Madam Lake; but he's dead like most of the fellows of that period. And those who are alive—or think they are—are some of 'em just walking around. Maybe I'm one of the latter but believe me, I'm still a live wire, even though I admit I would possess a wonderful brain if it didn't leak just a little once in a while when ye olde times are up for discussion.

ONE issue of ADVENTURE interests me greatly because it contains so much from so many sources about "Wild Bill" Hickok, General Custer and others of the once wild and wooly West. But in reading what your entertaining Camp-Fire contributors say and then going over some of the published things I have written about events on the Wyoming and Western Nebraska frontier, I reach the positive conclusion that some of us old fellows are sometimes terribly mixed in our dates. However, I am positive of one thing, viz.: I met "Wild Bill" every day for a number of weeks in Cheyenne during the beginning of the Black Hills gold excitement, and had many conversations with him. (I was in Wyoming before the gold strike in the Hills.)

He was to me—then a youth of 17, but of man's size—a curiosity that I could hardly keep away from. Even then there was a considerable dispute among the bullwhackers (of which I was one)as to whether he was a coward or a brave man. To me he seemed to be a little of each, and I will tell you why. In the first place, at that time (1875, I think) his eyesight had begun to fail him, and he gave that as a reason for not accepting a challenge to a duel at ten paces made by a small-sized California *buccaro* with whom he had a dispute either in McDaniels' Variety Theater or Jack Allen's Gold Room. The last-named was a combination hurdy-gurdy, variety show, beer-jerker's "palace" and gambling hall—faro, twenty-one, roulette, stud, etc.

MY FIRST meeting with "Bill" was in the Gold Room. I sat (as a mere piker) at the faro table, on a wooden chair. Pat Gorman (footnote No. 1) and a man known as "Big Ed" were running the game, Gorman dealing and "Big Ed" holding down the lookout chair. A bow-legged Texan was keeping cases. Chairs were set close together around the table, and every one of them was occupied, some of the time by two players, one standing on the rung, while others were reaching over heads and through gaps between players to place their bets (and few of them were the 25 cent white chips like mine) for it was, as we say nowadays, some game—what the gamblers used to call a *snap*. (The word *snap* not used in the sense of present day.) That is to say, some one outside the "house" (meaning Allen) had put up $25,000 or some other sum, and taken charge with the "lid off," meaning, of course, no limit to bets. I was a piker at the rate of from 25 cents ("two bits") to $2.00 a bet, following as best I could the bettors who seemed to be winning.

SUDDENLY just as I had "cashed in" and made up my mind to quit—ahead of the game, and with a fortune for me at that time of nearly $100—I felt a slight movement of my chair. A new deal had just begun, all bets were placed, and two or three "turns" made by Gorman, but I had made no wager on any one of the thirteen spades in the lay-out. So really I was due to "come in" or get out; and if, just at that moment "Bill" Hickok hadn't lost patience with me and pulled the chair out from under me, I would have quietly risen and gone over (probably) to the "21" game run by the famous Madam Mustache (footnote 2), a Frenchwoman with a small black mustache, and lost all I had taken from the "tiger." Instead, Bill's quick move caused me to sit down on the floor. He made some remark—I think, "Oh, give some one else a chance,"—and I, knowing him by sight, readily (and hastily) departed to the street, thus, no doubt, saving what I got out of the "snap" from the till of the Madam or the stud game running on the other side of the dance floor.

A day or two later I met "Bill" on the street and he smiled, stopped and said a whole lot of nice things, not forgetting to say several times that he didn't intend to hurt me and hoped he hadn't. He called me "Kid," put his hand on my shoulder and said, "Remember, I'm no enemy of yours."

THIS meeting made me like "Bill," but later on, as I got better acquainted, I couldn't help dislike him on account of some of the stories he told me about himself and what he did to poor Mormon women who, hitched like cattle, some years before, were hauling their effects from Nauvoo, Ill., to Brigham Young's promised land in Utah. Perhaps he lied, but he told circumstantial tales that were horrible in their detail.

A LITTLE later, either in '75 or early in '76 the authorities (or a vigilance committee) at Cheyenne, in an attempt to rid the town of "bad men," tacked notices on telegraph poles containing a list of names of men, headed by "Bill" Hickok, ordering them to leave town within forty-eight (or some other number of) hours.

And here is where "Bill" showed himself not to be a coward, for he not only refused to leave Cheyenne but, with a bowie knife, cut his own name out of the lists. This is no report that I heard—*I saw him do it.* Moreover, he stayed in town for a condiderable length of time after the period stipulated in the notice. Finally, however, he went to Custer City, then the chief town in the Black Hills, and was soon after murdered (footnote 3) by McCall (was it in 1877?)

IF MY estimate of "Wild Bill" Hickok is worth anything, I am willing, in the interest of history and to help straighten out the record, to give it. It is this: He was a man of nerve, and had, as city marshal of Abilene (I think) kept the town in fairly good order for those times, and in doing it was obliged to scatter quite a bit of lead among the garroters, then the pest of every camp along the K. P. Of course, he killed a number of men, and when he blew into Cheyenne on the big stampede to the "hills," after Gordon's wagon-train had been held up by Uncle Sam in the Bad Lands west of Fort Pierre at the request of the Interior Department, he was just a plain gambler and, I believe, not a very successful one and with but little money. I doubt if he owned a horse, something nearly every one had in those days (and blankets), although I have a faint recollection of seeing him emerge from Tracey's corral a-straddle one fine-looking sorrel and gallop off toward Fort D. A. Russell. Tracey's corral (and barn) were located on the outskirts of Cheyenne on the Laramie trail and our camp was on Crow Creek not far away in plain sight of Russell and Camp Carlin. For all I know, "Bill" was then headed for Custer, though some one may rise up and say he rode like a prince to that point in Johnny Slaughter's stage, à la Horace Greeley and Mark Twain.

THERE are several things I do not want to do, and do not intend to do:

1. Put myself forward as an authority on "Wild Bill" or as his biographer.
2. Give the impression that I ever was a pal of his, or
3. Try to give the Camp-Fire fellows an impression of myself that would be unjust (to me) by telling them of the faro incident, because
4. I wasn't then, haven't been since, am not now, and never will be a professional gambler. But—
5. In "them days" nearly every one on the frontier, especially youthful adventurers like myself, took a whirl at games of chance. (I've played a little penny ante since!)

I *know* this will shock some of my old lady friends, but as I am well into the 60's, and haven't a hair on my head that isn't white, and now live a somewhat prosaic life as a magazine editor (even in New York) I do not hesitate to sign my full name below, middle name and all, although if, when Cheyenne was humming, I had spelled out my middle name, I almost know some one would have taken a shot at me and I wouldn't be here to scribble this reminiscent gossip.

HERE are a few old-timers (of Wyoming when it had the word "Territory" added) who could add much to Camp-Fire discussion—former Mayor David S. Rose, of Milwaukee, (footnote 4) Willard A. Van Brunt (footnote 5), now in Los Angeles, Calif., who hunted buffalo in western Nebraska and Kansas, and others. Mr. Rose, like myself, Gorman, the faro dealer, and one or two more I might mention, went to Wyoming to die with the "con" as they called it, but "Dave" Rose and "Bill" Hooker are both alive and kicking and long past the three-score mark!

AS TO General Custer: Please let me say that in the several years I spent in Wyoming—at Cheyenne, Medicine Bow, Fort Fetterman, Fort Laramie, and at Red Cloud and Spotted Tail agencies, Sydney, Neb., old Sherman station on the U. P. (in the lower Black Hills) and at Laramie City, I always heard him spoken of as the best friend the citizens had in the Army. He was a very plain and agreeable man among the scattered populations, and greatly admired because he was a real fighter.

There was, almost always, ill feeling between the "buck" soldiers and the men who piloted the prairie schooners to and fro between the railroad and the outlying forts and Indian agencies. The army, however, was made up mostly of good men from top to bottom, and I couldn't understand why there was such ill-feeling. Of course, a bullwhacker or other citizen who misbehaved on a military reservation—and sometimes off it—went to the guardhouse without much ceremony except being disarmed, and, if obstreperous, prodded with a bayonet or belabored with a saber. For there was no civil law in the North Platte country, and none to speak of sometimes down toward the Colorado line. The bullwhacker with his sombrero, his greasy buckskin trousers, and his revolvers and butcher-knives, long hair and nearly always bearded face, while usually a pretty decent chap at heart, was not, as I can understand now, a man that an army officer would be apt to invite to dinner, although they sometimes drank together at Post Sutler Tillotson's bar at Fetterman, but not often.

HERE is a quotation from the chapter headed "Bill Hickok, City Marshal," in my book, "The Prairie Schooner," published in 1918:

" 'Wild Bill' Hickok was perhaps the best-known 'character' in Cheyenne in the '70's. He was a ministerial-looking person, but was not a confidence operator. [Like 'Canada Bill' (footnote 6) mentioned in a previous paragraph.] He was just a plain gambler, but he managed to escape the halter every time he put a notch in his gun. 'Bill' killed no one in Cheyenne; in fact, his days there were quiet and (in comparison with those in Kansas) prosy. His killings were all done at the time the K. P. was being built from the Missouri River to Denver. When he was in Cheyenne he was on his last legs—had begun, as they say nowadays, to slow up. Nevertheless he was feared by a great many, owing to his reputation, although among certain classes it was understood that he had lost his nerve. . . . Many deeds, however, that have been laid at his door, and others that he bragged about, were never committed. It has been estimated that he murdered all the way from fifteen to thirty men, but most of these were killed while he was marshal."

MY IMPRESSION is that "Bill" Hickok's real career of killing ended in Kansas. In fact, I am positive of it. Where it began I don't know. Anyway, he was perfectly tame when I knew him, and even playful, as I have endeavored to illustrate by relating the faro-table incident in which I played such an important rôle; though I think if I had resented his action he would have at least pulled his gun.

IN THE evening of my life I return almost daily in my thoughts to those wild days of my youth when life seemed of little value, when sowbelly and beans tasted better than they do now; when a cootie was not a cootie but a grayback, and when no real man in my class would admit he was not entertaining at least a few hundred; when I couldn't sleep

in a regular bed under a roof without a real sense of suffocation; when to be wet to the skin all day long—and perhaps all night in the bargain—never even started a cold; when I slept in the open, with the great dome of heaven, its twinkling stars and one blanket or buffalo robe all that was above me, and the thermometer below zero—or at least when high proof whisky froze, for we had no thermometers; when we slept peacefully with as many thicknesses of canvas wagon covering or blankets or gunny-sacks as we could find, *under us*; when four A.M. was the hour to rise and yoke up seven pairs of oxen and string them out into the Bad Lands or into a mountain pass, or around a "break neck"—or, but now I'm wandering, and so I'll close with the verse the good old buffalo hunter, Willard A. Van Brunt, quoted to me in a letter not long ago:

"I'm growing fonder of my staff,
I'm growing dimmer in my eyes,
I'm growing fainter in my laugh,
I'm growing deeper in my sighs;
I'm growing careless in my dress,
I'm growing frugal with my gold,
I'm growing wise—I'm growing—yes,
I'm growing old."

Sincerely,
WILLIAM FRANCIS HOOKER.

Footnotes to the above

1. Gorman died, I was told by his brother Tom, a few years ago at Gunnison, Colo., where he ran a hotel, I believe.
2. Madam Mustache was a Parisian, and at the time mentioned there were men and women in Cheyenne from every quarter of the globe.
3. When "Bill" was shot he was sitting with his back to a door, something he never would do in Cheyenne; and his assassin came upon him unawares.
4. Mr. Rose is practising law in New York City and represents big Western oil interests. He is hale and hearty and not long ago buried a pal of the early days at Tucson, when there was no one else to buy a coffin.
5. Mr. Van Brunt is one of the largest manufacturers of agricultural implements in the Northwest, at Horicon, Wis., now retired, I believe. He once entered a Comanche Indian camp alone, at night, and recovered a stolen horse. The Comanches were *en route* north to fight the Sioux.
6. "Canada Bill" was a famous three-card-monte man who cut a wide swath when history was making on the U. P. and in Cheyenne, and he is worth a chapter from some one who knew him well.—W. F. H.

A WORD from Edgar Young on his Off-the-Trail story in this issue. Some of us in the office had queried whether a man would really be rash enough to throw away his shoes in such circumstances.

Brooklyn, N. Y.

Perhaps I could state many things that would make the whole story appear more plausible from my own experience in the tropics about people remaining well through visitations of the plagues. I do know of several who went down from this country to Panama in the early days and who never even took one dose of quinine. An old timer, Mr. Wade, the trainmaster at Gatun for the I. C. C., and his wife never were sick from malaria or any other cause. I do know this, for he used to try to argue to me that it was Christian Science that did it, but my opinion is that it's luck as much as anything else. Incidentally, I saw this horrible plague in Guayaquil and was the only passenger who came on the *Quito* when she made her first trip to Balboa. I was hemmed in there and could not leave and saw enough horrors to do me the rest of my life. A close personal friend went insane and wasn't right in his head when I saw him the last time in Panama.

But all these things are, as they say in Spanish, *poco importa*, and the story must tell the thing itself.

ONE thing I stand on: No one in New York can instruct me on going barefooted in the jungle. Ninty-nine out of a hundred wear no shoes in the tropics, their use being confined to generals in the army and people of the higher walks of life. About the first thing that occurs to a man when he gets in mud half-way to his knees is to strip off his shoes. I pulled mine off and lost one after I had tied it on my pack, which rendered the other useless, and my partner and myself actually (not fictitiously, mind you) walked a couple of hundred miles of beach and jungle trail. Ouch! I cringe when I think of it.—EDGAR YOUNG.

THE following comrade was one of several who sent in newspaper clippings stating that Captain Clifford W. Sands, another Camp-Fire comrade, received the D. S. C. for saving the lives of three of his men during heavy fighting in the Argonne. You will remember that Sands bore the title of general as a result of Central American activities. In this letter the writer is merely coming forward to do his share in our Camp-Fire talks and to promote the general feeling of friendliness. He also has some interesting things to say about guns, but gun talk belongs more especially in "Ask Adventure."

Seattle, Washington.

I have often thought of doing my bit in the Camp-Fire pages, but nothing very exciting ever seemed to happen to me, except once. A friend and I *did* meet Kid Curry and his gang on the north fork of Grand River about eighty miles north of the Black Hills, South Dakota. It would have been a forced horse-trade as far as we were concerned if our broncks were not as tough looking as theirs.

The day before they had robbed the Belle Fourche Bank, killing the cashier. They loped around that part of the country for quite a while, and next turned up in South America and were cutting up quite a few didos down there.

I worked for Jim Browning on his ranch on the Little Missouri near Camp Crook. A good many old-timers would know him, as in early days himself and partner, a man by the name of Wringrose, ran a general store in Deadwood, S. D. So long.—C. L. MARTIN.

FOLLOWING Camp-Fire custom, Clay Perry stands up and introduces himself on the occasion of his first story in our magazine:

Pittsfield, Mass.

Well, fellows, this is the way it was: I was born in about the center of the U. S. A. and always wanted to go West and grow up with the country, but, instead, I stuck to the Middle West and grew up anyhow and then came East and lived up in the Berkshires.

Biographically speaking, the story of my life, so far, might be run off into a real moving picture and although I've never been so guilty—or happy—as to draft a scenario, here goes, for the amusement, I hope, of the Camp-Fire Circle:

"FROM THERE TO HERE"

A travelog in five reels

PART ONE

(Flicker, flicker) "The Farmer's First-born"—A potato farm in Badger Township, Waupaca County, Wisconsin. Father, mother, grandpa, horses, cattle, dog, chickens, sand and potatoes.

PART TWO

"*The Lay Preacher's Son*"—City of Waupaca. Sand-paved streets, potato warehouses, Dane's Hall, trolley-line to Old Soldiers' Home where father played bass drum in the band; court-house square with hitching-rails all round it.

PART THREE

"*The Ordained Minister's Son*"—Princeton; Poles and Poverty and a little church (flicker) Eureka (you couldn't find it on the map—you get there by river-steamer or stage-coach from Oshkosh); school and church. (Flicker) Elo (harder to find that Eureka). Mostly country, district school, trains don't stop, throw off mail and grab it on from a mail-crane; more church.

(Flicker) Hortonville-Junction town, county fair, camp-meeting, more church. (Flicker) Oconto Falls, pulp and paper mills, river, logs, timber-jacks, river-rats, Peerless tobacco, log-running, near-drowning, more church (Hero becomes janitor) (Flicker)

Shawano-Menominee Indian reserve, fire-water (genuine brand, made out of drug-store alcohol diluted at the pump by Chief Red Nose and his braves) "Whoeee! Ki, ya, ya!" And more church and Junior League—also love. (Flicker on) Fondulac, more poverty and much more church and Junior and Epworth League, shredded wheat biscuits for breakfast, dinner and supper, camp-meeting, a job on a farm, plenty to eat and less church (Flicker) Oakfield. Back to the country, high school, barley harvest, another sweetheart, a job singing in the choir (more church and prayer-meeting).

(Flicker-flicker) Weyauwega—By the mill-pond where the bull-heads bite; graduation and another love affair ('til death, this time). More church, official position (assistant postmaster twenty-five dollars a month). Traveling for the town promoter who had space to sell in county fair premium books.

(Flicker, flicker, flicker)

PART FOUR

"The College Stude"—Lawrence College, Appleton, coeducational, sectarian (Methodist). Ye Gods, more church and even chapel on week-days. Waiting on sixteen sisters in ladies' dormitory to earn my grub. (Flicker, flicker) The family flits from Weyauwega to Union Grove (I said this was a moving picture) Sugar-beets, cabbages and new-mown hay and cattle and R. L. S. and Ibsen on rainy Sundays (very little church).

(Flicker) Milwaukee, trucking freight, peddling Kickapoo Indian hand-bills, nabbing a job at the Y. M. C. A., to tend a fruit-farm over the Winter where grandma cooks pancakes that stick to your ribs and Our Hero reads his eyes out by kerosene light.

(Flicker) Back to Union Grove in the Spring and set up farm machinery and land a job weighing sugar-beets at Corliss Junction where there's plenty of time to translate the "Iliad" between loads.

(Flicker) to Waldo whence the family hath removed and try to sell contracts to farmers to raise sugar-beets—and translate the "Iliad" anyhow.

(Flicker) to Lawrence in mid-Winter and become a jovial Junior and fall in love with a sweet girl graduate in June.

(Flicker) back to Waldo and sell books on a bicycle. Much money! (Almost three hundred dollars.)

(Flicker) Back to college and sit up nights with the weakly weekly, of which Our Hero has been elected editor, and fall out of love.

(Flicker) On to Menasha and get sick with the wanderlust and (flicker) on to Milwaukee and from Milwaukee to Boston by trolley and (flicker) back to Springfield, Mass., and break into the newspaper game and fall in love again and—

(Flicker) Banished to the Berkshires and can't stand it any longer so (flicker) to Hartford, Conn., with the lady and get married (not in church but by a minister).

PART FIVE

(Flicker) Domesticity in two rooms and a typewriter desk and a chafing-dish.

(Flicker) to three rooms and a gas-stove. "It's a girl."

(Flicker) to four rooms.

(Flicker) to six rooms and a furnace and "It's a boy, this time."

(Flicker) to seven rooms, "Another boy."

(Flicker) to New York to fix the editors. "It's another girl."

(Flicker) Our Hero in desperation buys an eight-room house, hen-coop, dog-yard and typewriter of his own and proceeds to prostrate his genius before magazine editors. *Selah.*—CLAY PERRY.

HERE'S a man who fell out of a ship and scalped himself without any permanent bad effects:

Cranford, New Jersey.

Regarding scalping which is so often discussed. A longshoreman named Oscar ——(?), while opening the port of a ship in the winter of 1915 in New York harbor slipped and fell overboard, striking the port on his way down. Fortunately for him the ice was so jammed between the ship and the float that he lay there until we got him up, when I

saw his scalp was hanging over one shoulder. It was as pretty a piece of work as could be done by a surgeon. I examined the skull for a fracture and, finding none, drew back the scalp in place and held it there until proper attention could be given. He returned in about two weeks, none the worse for either the fall, scalping or immersion. One had to look closely to find the scar. He continued working until he hit the trail West, since which time I have not heard of him, but I feel sure that neither the lead from the port or the filthy water of our beautiful Hudson ever affected his health any more than it did the growth of his hair which, I had ample time to observe, was quite normal.—L. J. SCHAEFER.

LOOKING AHEAD FOR DEMOCRACY

MANY letters come in to "Looking Ahead" and I wish there were room for all of them. Last issue one was printed from a man who considers me a rotten and dangerous character, pro-German, a wild-eyed Socialist, in short, "one hell of an American." Here are two letters from men who are not wasting time in abuse, but, like myself and practically all of the many who write in to this department, are seriously trying to get at the root of our national troubles and to find a sane, right road out of the woods.

Goble, Oregon.

AS A whole we have neglected our citizenship, our duty to our neighbor and ourselves. The tendency has been, and to a great extent is, to allow other parties to do our constructive thinking on vital affairs, both political and economic. Most voters (those who trouble to vote) have been content to vote as "father" did, apparently not realizing that Change is continual and that Progress requires earnest thought and honest effort on the part of each individual.

It is my belief that one word covers the solution to the major part of our political and economic ills, and that word is "Education." Individually and collectively we need to be taught to think, to apply cause and effect, to profit by our mistakes, and to broaden and grow.—ALLAN WILSON.

Elkville, Ill.

MY IDEA of Democracy starts with respecting the rights of the other fellow, which I think should be taught and practised in our schools of this country more than it is.—S. A. FERGUSON.

THE growing unrest in this country will never be permanently quieted until the voters get a more real and more direct voice in their public affairs. Figure out carefully just how little your vote counts for after it has been handled by the present exaggerated party system and our out-of-date electoral machinery. Then figure out how much a citizen's vote *ought* to count for in a real democracy. There is the heart of the whole matter. What we have now is denatured democracy. What we need is the same general system of government renovated and remodeled, by due process of law, so that it will give us real democarcy—real, direct control by the people themselves instead of by the politicians and special interests.

THE second important point is that control by the people themselves will give us a government that can not be any better than we are ourselves. And we are not very good. I mean as citizens. Our parents, schools, churches and other agencies teach us individual morals, but there has been no one, or no general institution, to teach us civic morals. The result is that our civic morals are vastly lower than our individual morals. Many a man who would not rob his neighbor will unhesitatingly rob the state (which is all the people), call it merely "graft," grin and begin watching for the next opportunity to be a Benedict Arnold in selling the public trust for private gain.

The only remedy is the systematic teaching, to native-born even more than naturalized Americans, of civic morality, the real meaning of democracy and the actual operation of democracy in this particular country. Most Americans are inclined to brush this aside as a remedy too slow of results. It would be the quickest in the end. Until it becomes operative we shall go on continually building on sand, trying to build a sound house out of rotten bricks. It can't be done. No matter what the style of architecture followed, the house will not be sound.

The people must control, but the people must be fit to control.—A. S. H.

VARIOUS PRACTICAL SERVICES FREE TO ANY READER

THESE services of *Adventure* are free to *any one*. They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we offer them gladly and ask in return only that you *read and observe the simple rules*, thus saving needless delay and trouble for you and us. The whole spirit of this magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we *can* help you we're ready and willing to try.

Identification Cards

Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address, (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, each printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Dutch, Portuguese, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one or two friends, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application*. We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Metal Cards—For twenty-five cents we will send you, *post paid*, the same card in aluminum composition, perforated at each end. Enclose a self-addressed return envelope, but no postage. Twenty-five cents covers everything. Give same data as for pasteboard cards. Holders of pasteboard cards can be registered under both pasteboard and metal cards if desired, but old numbers can not be duplicated on metal cards. If you no longer wish your old card, destroy it carefully and notify us, to avoid confusion and possible false alarms to your friends registered under that card.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying.*

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

Missing Friends or Relatives

Our free service department "Lost Trails" in the pages following, though frequently used in cases where detective agencies, newspapers, and all other methods have failed, or for finding people long since dead, has located a very high percentage of those inquired for. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

Back Issues of *Adventure*

The Boston Magazine Exchange, 109 *Mountfort St., Boston, Mass., can supply* Adventure *back through* 1918, *and occasional copies before that.*

WILL SELL: Jan., Mar., May, Nov., 1914; July, 1915; Mar., to Aug., and Oct., to Dec., 1916; all 1917 except Mid-Sept.; all 1918 except Mid-June; all 1919.—Address JOHN JONES, East Syracuse, N. Y., R. F. D. No. 1.

WILL BUY: Nov. and Dec., 1915; Jan., Aug., and First Oct., 1917.—Address RUSSELL J. WALDO, 936 W. Moreland St., Indianapolis, Ind.

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

Manuscripts

Glad to look at any manuscript. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use almost no fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. Use fiction of almost any length; under 3000 welcomed.

Mail Address and Forwarding Service

This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied. Unclaimed mail which we have held for a long period is listed on the last page of this issue.

Camp-Fire Buttons

To be worn in lapel of coat by members of Camp-Fire—any one belongs who wishes to. Enameled in dark colors representing earth, sea and sky, and bears the numeral 71—the sum of the letters of the word Camp-Fire valued according to position in the alphabet. Very small and inconspicuous. Designed to indicate the common interest which is the only requisite for membership in Camp-Fire and to enable members to recognize each other when they meet in far places or at home. Twenty-five cents, post-paid, anywhere.

When sending for the button enclose a strong, self-addressed, *un*stamped envelope.

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

General Questions from Readers

In addition to our free service department "Ask Adventure" on the pages following, *Adventure* can sometimes answer other questions within our general field. When it can, it will. Expeditions and employment excepted.

Addresses

Order of the Restless—Organizing to unite for fellowship all who feel the wanderlust. First suggested in this magazine, though having no connection with it, aside from our friendly interest. Address WAYNE EBERLY, 1833 S St., N. W., Washington, D. C.

Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(*See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure."*)

Remember: Magazines are made up ahead of time. Allow for two or three months between sending and publication.

Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the department in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested, inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert will probably give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their departments subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but for their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided stamped and addressed envelope is enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular department whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose department it seems to belong.**

1. ★ Islands and Coasts
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, Hamilton, Bermuda. Islands of Indian and Atlantic oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits. Ports, trade, peoples, travel.

2. The Sea Part 1
BERIAH BROWN, Seattle Press Club, 1309 Fifth Ave., N. E., Seattle, Wash. Covering ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S.; seafaring on fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks, small-boat sailing, and old-time shipping and seafaring.

3. ★ The Sea Part 2
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, Hamilton, Bermuda. Such questions as pertain to the sea, ships and men [illegible] the British Empire, should be sent to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Brown.

4. Eastern U. S. Part 1
RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Little Falls, N. Y. Covering Mississippi, Ohio, Tennessee, Michigan and Hudson valleys; Great Lakes, Adirondacks, Chesapeake Bay; river, lake and road travel, game, fish and woodcraft; furs, freshwater pearls, herbs; and their markets.

5. Eastern U. S. Part 2
HAPSBURG LIEBE, 6 W. Concord Ave., Orlando, Florida. Covering Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, and N. and S. Carolina, Florida and Georgia except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

6. Eastern U. S. Part 3
DR. G. E. HATHORNE, 44 Central Street, Bangor, Maine. Covering Maine; fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

7. Middle Western U. S. Part 1
JOSEPH MILLS HANSON, (lately Capt. A. E. F.) care *Adventure*. Covering the Dakotas, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas. Hunting, fishing, travel. *Especially* early history of Missouri Valley.

8. Middle Western U. S. Part 2
JOHN B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac B'ld'g., Chicago, Ill. Covering Missouri, Arkansas and the Missouri Valley up to Sioux City, Iowa. Wilder countries of the Ozarks, and swamps. Hunting, fishing, trapping, farming, mining and range lands; big timber sections.

9. Middle Western U. S. Part 3
LARRY ST. JOHN, 1101 Kimball B'ld'g., Chicago, Ill. Covering Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Lake Michigan. Fishing, hunting, trapping, lumbering, canoeing, camping, guides, outfits, motoring, agriculture, minerals, natural history, clamming, early history, legends.

10. Western U. S. Part 1
E.E. HARRIMAN, 2303 W. 23d St., Los Angeles, Calif. Covering California, Oregon, Washington, Utah, Nevada, Arizona. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

11. Western U. S. Part 2 and Mexico Part 1 Northern
J. W. WHITEAKER, 1105 W. 10th St., Austin, Texas. Covering Texas, Oklahoma, and the border states of old Mexico: Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas. Minerals, lumbering, agriculture, travel, customs, topography, climate, natives, hunting, history, industries.

12. Mexico Part 2 Southern
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure Magazine*, Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Covering that part of Mexico lying south of a line drawn from Tampico to Mazatlan. Mining, agriculture, topography, travel, hunting, lumbering, history, natives, commerce.

★ *(Enclose addressed envelope with 5 cents in stamps, NOT attached)*
Return postage not required from U. S. or Canadian soldiers, sailors, or marines in service outside the U. S., its possessions, or Canada.

13. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 1
S. E. SANGSTER ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Covering Height of Land and northern parts of Quebec and Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C. P. R'y); southeastern parts of Ungava and Keewatin. Trips for sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Summer, Autumn and Winter outfits; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber; customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit.

14. North American Snow Countries Part 2
HARRY M. MOORE, Deseronto, Ont., covering south-eastern Ontario and the lower Ottawa Valley. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, mining, lumbering, agriculture, topography, travel, camping.

15. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 3
GEORGE L. CATTON, Gravenhurst, Muskoka, Ont., Canada. Covering Southern Ontario and Georgian Bay. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing.

16. North American Snow Countries Part 4
ED. L. CARSON, Burlington, Wash. Covering Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta including Peace River district; to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game, minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

17. North American Snow Countries Part 5
THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 2837 Fulton St., Berkeley, Calif. Covering Alaska. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipment, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.

18. North American Snow Countries. Part 6
H. S. BELCHER, The Hudson's Bay Company, Ft. Alexander, Manitoba, Canada. Covering Manitoba, Saskatchewan, MacKenzie and Northern Keewatin. Homesteading, mining, hunting, trapping, lumbering and travel.

19. North American Snow Countries Part 7
JAS. F. B. BELFORD, Richmond, Quebec. Covering New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Southeastern Quebec. Hunting, fishing, lumbering, camping, trapping, auto and canoe trips, history, topography, farming, homesteading, mining, paper and wood-pulp industries, land grants, water-power.

20. Hawaiian Islands and China
F. J. HALTON, 632 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill. Covering customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

21. Central America
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure Magazine*, Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Covering Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, customs, language, game, local conditions, minerals, trading.

22. South America. Part 1
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure Magazine*, Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Covering Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile. Geography, inhabitants, history, industries, topography, minerals, game, languages, customs.

23. South America. Part 2
P. H. GOLDSMITH, *Inter-American Magazine*, 407 West 117th St., New York, N. Y. Covering Venezuela, The Guianas, Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay and Argentine Republic. Travel, history, customs, industries, topography, natives, languages, hunting and fishing.

24. Asia, Southern
GORDON MCCREAGH, 21 East 14th St., New York City. Covering Red Sea, Persian Gulf, India, Tibet, Burma, Western China, Siam, Andamans, Malay States, Borneo, the Treaty Ports; hunting, trading, traveling.

25. Philippine Islands
BUCK CONNOR, Box 807 A, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, N. M. Covering history, natives, topography, customs, travel, hunting, fishing, minerals, agriculture, exports and imports; manufacturing.

26. Japan
GRACE P. T. KNUDSON, Castine, Maine. Covering Japan: Commerce, politics, people, customs, history, geography, travel, agriculture, art, curios.

27. Russia and Eastern Siberia
MAJOR A. M. LOCHWITZKY (Formerly Lieut.-Col. I. R. A., Ret.), Austin, Texas. Covering Petrograd and its province; Finland, Northern Caucasus; Primorsk District, Island of Sakhalien; travel, hunting, fishing; explorations among native tribes; markets, trade, curios.

28. Africa Part 1
THOMAS S. MILLER, Carmel, Monterey Co., Calif. Covering the Gold, Ivory and Fever Coasts of West Africa, the Niger River from the delta to Jebba, Northern Nigeria. Canoeing, labor, trails, trade, expenses, outfitting, flora; tribal histories, witchcraft, savagery.

29. Africa Part 2
GEORGE E. HOLT, Frederick, Md. Covering Morocco; travel, tribes, customs, history, topography, trade.

30. ★ Africa Part 3 Portuguese East Africa
R. W. WARING, Corunna, Ontario, Canada. Covering trade, produce, climate, opportunities, game, wild life, travel, expenses, outfits, health, etc.

31. ★ Africa Part 4 Transvaal, N. W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East Africa, Uganda and the Upper Congo.
CHARLES BEADLE, care Society of Authors and Composers, Central Buildings, Tothill St., Westminster, London, England. Covering geography, hunting, equipment, trading, climate, mining, transport, customs, living conditions, witchcraft, opportunities for adventure and sport.

32. ★ New Zealand and the South Sea Islands
TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand. Covering New Zealand, Cook Islands and Samoa. Travel, history, customs; opportunities for adventurers, explorers and sportsmen.

33. ★ Australia and Tasmania
ALBERT GOLDIE, Hotel Sydney, Sydney, Australia. Covering customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, politics, history.

FIREARMS, PAST AND PRESENT

Rifles, shotguns, pistols, revolvers and ammunition. (Any questions on the arms adapted to a particular locality should *not* be sent to this department but to the "Ask Adventure" editor covering the district in question.)

A.—All Shotguns (including foreign and American makes). J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

B.—All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers (including foreign and American makes). D. WIGGINS, Salem, Ore.

FISHING IN NORTH AMERICA

Salt and Fresh Water Fishing

J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Covering fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting; live bait; camping outfits.

STANDING INFORMATION

For general information on U. S. and its possessions, write Sup't of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications.

For the Philippines and Porto Rico, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dep't, Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, T. H. Also, Dep't of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dep't of Agri., Com., and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

For Central and South America, John Barrett, Dir. Gen. Pan-American Union, Wash., D. C.

For R. N. W. M. P., Commissioner Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can. Only unmarried British subjects, age 18 to 40, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs., accepted.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal Commission, Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dep't of Com., Wash., D. C.

★ *(Enclose addressed envelope with 5 cents in stamps NOT attached)*

A Great Adventure

WHAT a trip for red-blooded men with restless feet! Through the Peruvian Andes, down the broad Ucayali past the unexplored land of the Jivero Indians, thence out on to the mighty Amazon, and finally Para, and home:

Question:—"I want to see more of the world before settling down. I am particularly interested in that part of western Brazil lying near the borders of Bolivia and Peru. It strikes me that section ought to offer adventures a-plenty.

Real jungle is what I want. Territory where no white man has ever passed. So my eyes are on the Upper Amazon and the foothills of Peru. My questions are:

1. What route should I take, and what would be the approximate cost? What is the proper means of transportation?

2. When is the best time to leave the United States?

3. What should I take in the line of supplies and medical equipment?

4. What natives will I meet? Are they hostile? What are their customs?

5. How much ammunition will I need for a long stay?

6. What animals can I count on to supply food?

7. Are the skins of any animals found there worth preserving?

8. What is the duty on gold and other articles I may bring from the States?

9. Where can I buy reliable maps of the country and what will they cost?"—GEORGE PARODI, New York City.

Answer, by Mr. Goldsmith:—You have struck the part of South America that probably forms the greatest stretches of unexplored and more or less wild country, and I think there is no doubt that you could find plenty of adventure there.

1. You can enter by either of two ways: by the Atlantic and the River Amazon, leaving the ocean steamer at Pará and ascending the rivers on gradually diminishing steamers to Iquitos, Perú. To reach Pará, you go by small steamer directly from some point in the United States, or upon one of the large steamers from New York to Bahia, returning on a small boat to Pará. The first class fare to Bahia from New York is about $390, and the second-class about $170. The fare directly to Pará would depend upon the point from which you sailed from the United States and the kind of boat, but it ought to be some $20 to $30 less; and if you went to Bahia and returned to Pará, it would be about that much more than to Bahia. The sailing time from New York to Bahia is from 15 to 19 days, and from Pará to Iquitos from 12 to 20 days. The expense of the trip from Pará to Iquitos would depend upon the kind of boat used, the cost running from $25 to $50. I do not recommend this trip for the ascent, however, but rather for the descent, after finishing your explorations, if you wish to return to the United States.

A more comfortable way to enter, and one that offers much interest, would be to sail from New York to Callao, Perú, via the Panamá Canal. W. R. Grace & Co. run boats directly to that port from New York, and the fare is $260. From Callao you go by train or by street railway to Lima, the capital, seven miles. In Lima all supplies can readily be bought. Then you go by train to La Oroya, the eastern terminus of the railway; then on muleback to Canchamayo, Perú, which is on the edge of the wilds. From that point you might go in either one of several directions. Probably the best route would be along the Palcazu River, using canoes and taking Indians as guides, aides and porters. On either bank you have hundreds of miles to explore. There is plenty of traffic of one kind or another on the river. You could readily lose yourself by taking to the wilds in either direction.

To reach Brazil you would continue this route along the Palcazu to the River Pachitea, which is formed by the Palcazu and the Pichis. Following the Pachitea, you reach its junction with the great river Ucayali, and this brings you to the last town in Perú before you enter Brazilian territory—Iquitos. From Lima to Iquitos you would require from 25 to 50 days. The railway fare is from 30 to 40 *solos* ($15 to $20), and you would have to pay the Indians very little, one or two cheap guns, pistols, or some such, regarding which I shall have more to say.

From Iquitos to the mouth of the Amazon at Pará, you could descend in a small steamer, the trip downward being made in about 10 days.

Back of all these rivers lies unexplored country, an immense area.

2. It would be well to reach the wilds during the so-called dry season, when it rains only in the afternoon, and not all the time, that is, from April until July. This would mean that you ought to leave the United States about the middle of February.

3. Your equipment might well be bought in Lima. Of medicine, you ought to have plenty of quinine, purgatives, iodine for insect bites, laudanum, for stomachache due to change of water, ammonia water and bottles of Perry Davis' "Pain Killer," good for stomachache and, along with ammonia, helpful in case of scorpion stings. You would need a few strong lightweight clothes. The weather will always be hot. Your best footwear, roughing it, would be *alpargates*, to be bought in Lima. You would need a hammock and you can secure one light enough to be worn around your waist as a belt. You ought to carry a good repeating rifle and some good pistol, as well as a *machete*, purchased in Lima, which serves as a weapon and an axe. Carry your supply of ammunition from the United States. You should start from Lima with all the tinned and dried provisions you can pack. Sugar and alcohol can be secured there.

Better than money in the wilds would be a good supply of cheap shotguns, muzzle-loading, with powder, shot and balls, and percussion caps. The Indians of this region have little use for cartridges. Also, carry along a big supply of knives, scissors, shears, needles, thread, white cloth, beads, and in general any small *useful articles*. Cheap pocket-knives and pistols, the latter old-fashioned and muzzle-loading, are all good for trading.

Guides can be gotten in Canchamayo or Iquitos from the local authorities.

4. You will learn about the Indian customs in the wilds when you get there; the customs of the civilized people of Perú are about like those of other people of the same kind.

5. Carry enough ammunition to supply you during the length of your stay, about which only you can know. If you correspond with Mr. Beebe, Winchester Repeating Arms Company, New Haven, Connecticut, as to the best kind of Winchester riffle to carry, he will mention one to you for which you can obtain plenty of ammunition in Lima.

6. Until you reach the end of the railway, you can buy food at hotels or restaurants. In all the rivers you will find plenty of fish. You should provide yourself with hooks and tackle of a primitive character such as you can get in Iquitos. There are plenty of bear, wild boar, armadillos, tapirs, and a vast variety of birds. You should have tinned or dried food for emergencies, and a good supply of chocolate, which can be gotten in the country.

7. Skins of the jaguars are worth preserving, as also the skins of smaller cats. They have more or less value. Do not bother about tents. With a good rubber poncho or blanket, to be gotten in Lima, you have something to put under you and over you.

8. Do not bother about the export duty on gold. It is not heavy, and if you get much of it, you will be willing to pay. You would have to pay duty on the articles you would take in for trading, but not on your personal equipment.

9. You can get maps in Lima, and they are not expensive. If you look up Señor Dr. don José Antonio de Lavalle, Avenida de Chorrillos, 348, Barranco, Lima, while you are there, he can tell you all about maps.

Learning to Rough-It

PREPARING one's self, both physically and mentally, for the rough life of the raw, far places is a process which demands time and effort for the average man. Just as training was necessary to prepare soldiers for the hardships of warfare:

Question:—"I noticed that in your reply to Mr. Hite you advise him to 'rough it in the mountains, learn to make your own camp-fire, rustle grub, harden to heat and cold, hunger and fatigue.' What I would like to ask is, where is the best place to learn those things?

A friend of mine and myself have been planning to take a trip of that sort and we thought that the best place would be among the Shoshone Mountains in Wyoming. Can you suggest a better place, or can you tell me of some one who can?"—GILBERT W. KEECH, Princeton, N. J.

Answer, by Mr. Miller:—My mountaineering in America has been done in the British Columbian Rockies, the Cascade Mountains and the Sierras, so it is hard for me to advise on what you might run into in the mid-West, but I'll relate in brief the experience of Mrs. Miller and myself in the Sierras from October, 1918, to June, 1919.

We struck a country that had been well mined about thirty years ago and then deserted. We found shacks in pretty good condition scattered around in a wide area, as we had expected, and had therefore not brought tents. As we knew we would be snowed in for four months we had to look to solid comfort. But for a Summer in the mountains I would only take a waterproof spread. A bed of brush or pine-needles is as good as a mattress. You will be surprised how quick you harden to it. We were fortunately in a game country, but had to pack up our flour, beans, etc., over eighteen miles of bad trail, for we could not keep a horse or even a burro in the country. By all means pick up a donkey if you can.

You see, it would be hard to say just where is the best place to learn this hardening process. Personally, if I were in your place, I'd go off with my friend to some mining or farming district in the mountains and work a while, say a month, and pick up all I could about the topography. I was never in any part of America that had not its abandoned shacks, log cabins, etc.

The actual hardening is largely a matter of will. So many look on a camp as a chance to hobo! Nor is a bean, flapjack and canned milk diet healthful. You want to locate near a watercress stream, and above all a berry district, for fruit keeps one in trim better than anything I know. Of course, from an ideal point of view, you want access to fresh milk and eggs. In fact, coming right down to it, the real hardships are the hardships of the stomach. Mrs. Miller and myself were cut off from the world for four months, but the only inconvenience we suffered was the lack of variety of food. Of course, you want, if possible, to locate near a river, not merely for the fish, drinking water, morning plunge, but for the scenic and psychological effects.

To Build a Log Cabin

YOU may need to know some time. So here's the way it's done. A neat home in the woods, able to withstand the roughest weather, is yours if you care to build it:

Question:—"I should like information about building a log cabin of a size suitable to give two people comfortable living quarters. Please explain the construction fully, as this cabin business is a new game with me. I shall build it this Summer somewhere in the Peace River country."—J. M. ANDERSON, Toronto, Canada.

Answer, by Mr. Harriman:—To answer your question I will describe the manner in which I built a cabin in Minnesota. Of course I had to have help in the operations, as I used logs averaging ten inches in thickness.

First I laid a foundation by placing two logs parallel with each other, twelve feet apart, inside measure. They were twenty-four feet long. Each log measured about eighteen inches at the butt. Then I cut two logs fifteen feet long, dragged them to each end and began work with an ax. I scored and chipped the tops of the side logs to a fairly straight line. Then I chopped and split off each end till it was halved horizontally. I cut the end logs in the same way and rolled them on to the side logs. The flat surface on the end logs rested on the flat places in the side logs. Then I bored them and drove in oak pins, making the corners solid. With a long lever and flat stones, I made the low foundation logs level.

Now I brought my first side logs for the superstructure and had my helpers begin cutting the big notches, while I dapped out seats in the side logs of the foundation to receive the floor joists. When

the logs had been notched, we rolled them into place and dropped the end logs into the notches. Each end log had been notched to match the side logs. We did not pin these, letting the notches hold them.

The second tier of logs had the butts turned the other way, so as to keep the top as near level as possible. We went on laying up the walls—one log with butt to the east, the next with butt to the west. When the walls were approximately eight feet tall we stopped.

Now we set up a plank at each side of what was to be our door and spiked it to the logs. That held them fast and we began to saw down with a narrow-bladed saw, until we had room for a window. Later I cut my seventh side log down half-way before placing it, so as to let a six-foot saw pass through. With a plank spiked on to the line and plumb, one can saw down on a true line at both sides, tumble the bits of log out and have his door open. The same with windows.

After I had cut my openings, leaving them wide enough to take in a frame, I set this plank frame. Then I carried in poles five or six inches thick, cut to a length, shaped at the ends and hewed straight. These I set in the daps I had made and was ready for my floor.

For rafters I used tamarack poles, four to five inches thick and notched them into the logs, with a square heel to hold them from all danger of sliding. I pinned these with oak pins, ¾ of an inch thick. Across these rafters I placed rows of poles about 2½ to 3 inches thick, notched down half-way on rafters. I did not notch the rafters as that would weaken them. These poles I nailed with long nails.

On top of these I placed basswood bark, peeled when the sap was rising, when it comes off in great sheets. I had spaced my poles and now I cut my bark long enough to overhang at the eaves about a foot and reached across two spaces. The second row then lapped the first one foot and I had a tight roof. The gables I filled by running a horizontal pole and covered with bark.

I made a front door and a back door, and over the latter I built a pole lean-to, with bark roof and wall covering, for a kitchen. Then I made a partition by using small tamarack poles and painted cloth, with a light odor of the same material, set four windows in main part and one in kitchen. Laid floor of split puncheons, cut fairly smooth with an adz.

Camping in Florida

WHEN a hunter dies, if his record is good, he goes to Lake Apopka, Florida—it's Heaven enough for him. And for fishermen, too. A fine place to camp, with ducks, quail, rabbits, all within gunshot of the lake. Why not read about the blizzards next Winter while trolling for old bronze-backs along some lazy lagoon?

Question:—"I think a change from six months frost, snow and ice to a kinder climate would benefit my health, as I feel very much better in Summer when I can be out in the open camping and fishing.

Do you know of any good place in the lower valleys of the Carolinas, northern part of Georgia, eastern part of Tennessee—not more than 1,000 feet above sea level—or the Gulf Coast and the southern interior of Florida where I could camp out in comfort all the year around? I want a secluded place on the edge of the wilderness where very few go to hunt and fish, but not too far from a good town, comparatively free from malaria and poisonous reptiles and insects so I could camp under canvas safely, and where I could have hunting and fishing privileges for miles around without interference. Can you direct me to such a place?

I have made several inquiries about different places, but it appears that everybody's crow is the whitest. I have quite a lot of booklets, etc., about Florida, and I note that you have moved there from Tennessee. Don't you find the warm weather there enervating after living in the Tennessee mountains? I don't like the cold weather here, and the warm weather in Summer agrees with me much better, but on the other hand I would not care to settle down in a climate that would have a tendency to make me useless and make my blood poor. Some say the climate in the vicinity of Fort Myers is the best in America, but I am inclined to think this is from a Winter resident point of view. How about it in the Summer? It is also said that the hunting and fishing in the same vicinity is the best to be had anywhere. I would certainly like to get to a place where I could get something nearly every time I went out.

In the places I have mentioned, where is the most deer, black bear, turkey, hares, etc., to be found. Is it the southern part of Florida?

I would be very pleased to hear from you and get your opinion, as the different railways, etc., try to boost their own territory, making it very difficult to make a selection. I want to be right the first time, if possible, as I don't want to move around searching for places."—C. J. JOHNSTON, Montreal, Canada.

Answer, by Mr. Liebe:—You can hardly camp out the year around in any of the States you mention, except Florida. I have seen a temperature of 25 below in Tennessee, and North Carolina probably had the same temperature at the same time. It is never cold at that time in Georgia or South Carolina, but the Summers in these two States are hotter (though not so long) than those in Florida. Except for a visit to Tennessee, I have been here for fifteen months, and I have never seen the thermometer higher than 98, which occurred only twice, once in August and once in October.

I believe Florida will come nearer suiting you than anywhere else I know, though there are drawbacks even here. Camping out on the edge of things, as you wish to camp, you will hardly get good water to drink always, and that would probably mean eventually more or less of malaria. Malaria never hurt me; it might not hurt you. Then there are poisonous snakes almost anywhere there is good hunting and fishing down here, though not so many, perhaps, as you would think. I have been in jungles and swamps and bayheads from coast to coast, and I haven't seen a fourth of a dozen live wild rattlers. Moccasins are more numerous, but not so apt to bite.

I have not found the climate weakening. It does have, after a time, a sort of lazying effect; a fellow sort of slows up, and, doubtless, lives longer because of it. The climate at Fort Myers is called good; but I don't think it has anything on the climate at,

say, Miami, St. Petersburg, or Orlando. Speaking of malaria, I haven't heard the word mentioned a dozen times since I've been here. One need not have malaria here if he is careful.

The best hunting is out from Fort Myers. There are bear, deer, panther, wildcat, turkey, rabbits, quail, raccoon, opossum, etc. But if you get far enough out to be in the midst of good hunting, you will hardly be in touch with a town. There is good fishing at Fort Myers, but it is mostly salt-water fishing, a thing I don't know very much about.

Considering everything, if I were you I would try Lake Apopka, which is a big lake fourteen miles from here. It is full of bass and pickerel. Behind it is a sawgrass marsh that affords some duck-shooting, and in the country near by there is some such game as quail, squirrels and rabbits. I can not imagine anything better than to have a camp on Apopka—a tent with a board floor—and a row-boat with a motor in it. They tell around here that when a sportsman dies, if he's been real good, he is sent to Lake Apopka instead of to heaven! There is a nice village, Winter Garden, out there, and there is an all-brick road from there to Orlando.

Concerning game in the Tennessee mountains, there isn't very much. I never could understand why. Perhaps the hawks get it when it's young.

Hitting a Moving Target

THIS is the acme of shooting, a sort of post-graduate course in the use of firearms, and requires a good eye, steady nerves, and long, patient practise. Even then you may not succeed in hitting the glass ball unless you begin right in learning:

Question:—"I am a poor shot at moving targets with a rifle and am very anxious to be rated good in this class. My eyesight is excellent, my nerve is steady, but I seem slow in aligning the sights. Practise doesn't seem to improve me, while many are better than I with no practise at all.

Please give me some pointers on hitting moving targets. Perhaps my method is wrong. Are there any books on the subject which would help me?

I have had little experience with the pistol, but would like to become proficient with it, also."—I. J. KEEPES, Mt. Carmel, Ill.

Answer, by Mr. Wiggins:—First let me tell you that skill in shooting moving objects with the pistol or revolver is merely a postgraduate course to such shooting with the rifle. You must become proficient with the latter arm first, then a good amount of practise with the short guns will secure the desired effect. Such has been my experience, at least.

Now, for your rifle work, try throwing the rifle to your shoulder and having it come so exactly to the same place each time that the sights will align themselves without effort on your part on a target on the wall. This with an empty rifle of course, and indoors or out. I know men who throw the rifle this way a hundred times a day, but I never had to follow it so closely.

In time that rifle will point like your finger: true every time to the mark. Then take up the same stunt with loaded cartridge, outdoors. Personally, I use peep sights, but others seem to do the best work with open ones. Any of the modern .22 repeaters are well adapted to this, as are the .22 automatics.

Try large objects at first; a tin can is as good as you will find. Shoot at it swinging on a string at ten yards till you can hit it every time, then gradually increase the distance. Then try smaller objects, and don't forget to hold a little in front of the can, in the direction in which it is moving.

After becoming proficient at swinging targets, try things thrown in the air: more quart tin cans, for choice. And the same principle applies to this work; lead, or hold ahead of the target a bit. In the case of thrown targets, hold a little under it as it falls.

I have hit some small objects this way; I seem to recall four .22 empty short cartridges out of five. Have slipped in recent years, anyway.

Now, the .22 revolver is the best, I find, but I have done such good work with the .22 Colt automatic pistol that I can also recommend that arm for this work also. Single shot Stevens and Smith & Wesson pistols are used, but I always choose a revolver, myself. .22 Colt or Smith & Wesson are the only ones I consider. I prefer the .22 short cartridge loaded with semi-smokeless or Lesmoke powder for all shooting of this character.

For books which will prove of value to you in acquiring skill at this type of work I advise you to communicate with the following firm:

The Outing Publishing Company, 141-145 West Thirty-sixth St., New York, N. Y. They publish books on every type of sport, and I have found them very helpful in shooting.

Mongolia for Stock Raising

WHEN a Yankee feels the pump of pioneer blood so strongly that he wants to start ranching in Mongolia, there's proof sufficient that American conquests are by no means ended. They are reaching today into far corners of the world, little suspected by average mortals. China, Peru, Borneo, the lands of the earth are rewarding American labor and capital with wealth that is becoming a golden stream:

Question:—"In regard to Mongolia, will you kindly answer the following questions?

1. What are the prospects for cattle-raising there?

2. Can you give me any information as to how one can get a large tract of land from the government there, and concerning their land laws, etc.?

3. Can you give me general information concerning the climate, soil, people, minerals?"—FREDERIC P. SCHWAB, Bradford, Pa.

Answer, by Mr. Halton:—The following information with regard to Mongolia will, I think, cover your inquiries:

1. Cattle and sheep are raised in large quantities in Mongolia by the natives but the chances of a white man surviving in competition with the natives are not bright. Traders assemble their wool and skins at Kalgan on the frontier of Mongolia, where they are purchased, partially treated, tanned and then shipped to Tientsin, on the coast, for export.

2. Practically all of Mongolia is occupied by nomadic tribes. The people are Turkish in the

west, Chinese in the south, and Mongols in Mongolia proper. Awaiting development are wonderful stretches of virgin, fertile lands, capable of producing enormous crops, and vast stretches of land wonderfully adapted to grazing. As to obtaining large tracts of this land from the Chinese Government, I would suggest that you write to the Minister of Agriculture, Chinese Government, Pekin, China, and also inquire as to the land laws. It is doubtful if such a concession would be granted to foreigners because of the inability of the Chinese Government to properly protect them in the isolated places.

3. Mongolia is a vast, basin-like plateau of 3,000 to 4,000 feet elevation, surrounded by mountain ranges and undulating steppes. Near the center is the so-called Gobi Desert of more than 260,000 square miles. There is a road between Kalgan and Urga, the capital, 550 miles across this region but it traverses no real desert. The most difficult part of the journey is through the rocky ravines, known as the Kalgan Pass, and then the road passes through grazing lands all the way to Urga except for a strip of gravel waste land, the eastern spur of the Gobi Desert. This road continues to Kiakhta and the caravan routes lead to Siberia with camel and bullock trains.

Dry weather prevails most of the year. The only rain comes with thunderstorms and showers in Summer. In Winter the temperature is below zero for four months and below the freezing point for six months, the cold being accompanied by high winds and frequent sand-storms.

As stated above, the people are nomadic and the language used is Mongolian.

Regarding minerals: Gold has been mined for years. The mineral wealth is subject to investigation but is reputed to be enormous.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right, in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

L. A. S. or J. JOHNSON. Write sister.—Address EDITH TALBOT, Fox, Arkansas.

COPHY, CLARENCE L. Last heard of in Iowa. Any one knowing his whereabouts please write his sister.—CLARA M. COPHY, 230 W. 4th St., Chanute, Kansas.

NANMAN, MRS. AL or LENNA. Last heard of in 1916 in New York City, N. Y. Write your brother Dick. I'm worried.—Address DICK CARIS, Blythe, Cal.

DARROW, LIONEL. Of Binghamton, N. Y. Please write.—Address LT. ALFRED C. HESS, 1114 Mt. Vernon St., Philadelphia, Pa.

ROGERS, CHARLES. Of Brooklyn, N. Y. Please write.—Address LT. ALFRED C. HESS, 1114 Mt. Vernon St., Philadelphia, Pa.

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the first February issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

HESS, E. B. Of Red Rock, N. Y. Please write.—Address ALFRED C. HESS, 1114 Mt. Vernon St., Phila., Pa.

HANNAH, G. M. Of U. S. S. *Yankton*. Please write.—Address ALFRED C. HESS, 1114 Mt. Vernon St., Phila., Pa.

CAIN, LYLE. Member of Co. K, 38th Inf., 3rd Div. Last seen on July 22, 1918, in the Forêt de Fère. Any one knowing his present whereabouts please write. GILBERT S. DECKER, 290 Mill St., Poughkeepsie, N. Y.

HOOPER, WILLIAM H. Father and two brothers—one's name William; don't know younger brother's name. Last heard of in Fort Scott, Kansas, about forty years ago. Father was a shoemaker. Any information regarding same will be appreciated.—Address MRS. W. B. NUTTING, 215 E. 33rd St., Portland, Oregon.

HYLAMAN, JOE. Last heard from at Round Grove, Ill., in 1869. Any information as to his whereabouts will be appreciated.—Address JOHN ARTHUR NILES, Box 880, Wilmington, Del.

LIGHT, DANIEL F. Was warrant boatswain in U. S. Navy. Friend from Buitenzorg is looking for you. What news of Schiedamschiedijk?—Address L. T., No. 398, care of *Adventure*.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

DYHSMA, BARTLES. Emigrated from Holland to America in 1898, and last heard of in Muskegon, Michigan, where he worked as a cabinet-maker. Any one knowing his whereabouts please communicate with HINKE JANS DYHSMA, 7 Pottebakkers Straat, Rotterdam, Holland.

DIETERICH, MARTIN M. Born in Washington Co., Md. Was married to a woman named Maggie Rumel. They had six children. Edgar, Amanda, Harry, Charles, Walter and Edward. He was a miller by trade. Moved to Wooster, Ohio, and last heard of was living in northwestern part of Ohio. Any information will be appreciated.—Address D. W. DIETERICH, Locke, Washington.

MACINTYRE, EARL. Of Manistee, N. Y. Please write.—Address ALFRED C. HESS, 1114 Mt. Vernon St., Philadelphia, Pa.

LARITY, ALBERT. Last heard of following horse races. Age about fifty. Any information will be appreciated by his niece, MRS. CLARA FRINK, Lindsay, Cal. R. A.

KELLER, BYRON LORING, Sergeant. Latest address Headquarters Company, 118th Field Artillery, A. P. O. 711, A. E. F. All mail returned, marked "Organization Disbanded." All mail addressed to Dayton, Ohio, returned also. Henri wants to hear from you. Any one knowing his whereabouts will communicate with—J. NOLAN, Gen. Del., Portland, Oregon.

ROB[illegible]ORA FRANK. Six feet one inch, heavy. In [illegible] N. G. in 1916. Fingers damaged in explosion. Last heard from in Red Granite, Wis. Was member of Adv. Ex.—Address L. T., No. 399, care of *Adventure*.

VAN TILBURG, FRANK. Of Memphis, Tennessee. Last seen there in 1901. Any information will be appreciated by his brother.—Address CLARENCE W. VAN TILBURG, 222 No. 53rd St., Philadelphia, Pa.

MAXWELL, HOWARD S. Of Crawfordsville, Ind. Any one knowing his whereabouts will greatly accommodate two old friends by showing him this, or by communicating with F. P. A., care of *Adventure*.

MURPHY, DAN. Last heard of when he left La Moire, Cal., for Central America. I am coming to Central America, and must hear from you.—Address JIM CLEVE, care of *Adventure*.

CARPENTER. Father. Last heard of in Summeral, Mississippi. Is about fifty-three years old, black hair, blue eyes and five feet ten inches tall. Occupation, train man.—WILDA MAY CARPENTER, Box 261, Bay City, Texas.

WHITNEY, EARL. Left Utica about March, 1905. Last heard of in Toronto, Canada. Write to your cousin Howard. Important.—Address H. L. DEMING, 12 Hampden Pl., Utica, N. Y.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

BURDICK, DANIEL HENRY. Formerly of Seattle, Wash.; and Hutchinson, Kansas. Last heard of in Seattle, and was planning on enlisting in the Army for foreign service. Your brother George wishes to hear from you and plan a trip to S. A. and Africa this Summer.—Address GEORGE H. BURDICK, Terminal, Cal.

THE following have been inquired for in full in either the First July or Mid-July issues of Adventure. They can get the name of the inquirer from this magazine:

BERGMAN, FRED; Bohler, Eddie L.; Canfield, Russell H.; Chesworth, Thomas; Clingham, Charles; Coghill, Ion D., Davidson, Frank Leslie; Doyle, Michael; Dunn, Arthur A.; Francis, J. F.; Gilly, Thomas; Given, John; Heffernan, Otto A.; Howell, Ed.; Kircher, Hugo H.; Lee, Delbert E.; Lowey, Daniel; McCormick, Thomas C.; Miller, Dick; Ogg, Linwood C.; Price, Slim; Rains, Mrs. Dave; Ray, James Richard; Ringenburg, Lester; Siegfried, Otto; Wilmont, F. B.; Wilson, George; Wilson, Virgil Elwood.

MANUSCRIPTS UNCLAIMED

HASTLAR GAL BREATH; Ruth Gilfillan; Jack P. Robinson; Ray Ozmer; Miss Jimmie Banks; O. B. Franklin; Lieutenant Wm. S. Hilles; G. H. Bennett; Byron Chisholm; A. B. Paradis; E. E. S. Atkins; G. E. Hungerford; A. Gaylord, E. J. Moran; F. S. Emerson; E. Murphy; J. Dunn; J. Higmon; J. E. Warner; L. E. Patten; L. T. Bennett; Sinn Cardie.

UNCLAIMED mail is held by Adventure for the following persons, who may obtain it by sending us present address and proof of identity:

BEATON, SGT. MAJOR G. M.; Benson, Edwin Worth; Bertsch, Elizabeth; Bonner, Major J. S.; Mrs. Brownell; Carpenter, Capt. Robert S.; "Chink"; Colesby; Cook, Bob, Elliot D.; Cook, William N.; Cosby, Arthur F.; Crashley, Wm. T.; Eager, Paul Roman; Erwin, Phil; Fairfax, Boyd; Fisher, Edward E.; Fisher, Sgt. R.; Garson, Ed.; Gordon, W. A.; Green, Billy; Green, W.; Hale, Robert E.; Harris, Walter J.; Hart, Jack; Harwood, J.; Hines, Joseph; Hoffman, J. M.; Hughes, Frank E.; Hunt, Daniel O'Connell; Jackson, Robert R.; Kohlhammer, Jack; Kuckaby, William Francis; Kuhn, Edward; Kutcher, Sgt. Harry; Lafler, Mrs. Harry; Lancaster, C. E.; Larisey, Jack; Lauder, Harry; Lee, Dr. C.; Lee, Capt. Harry, A. R. C.; Lee, Dr. William R.; Lewis, Warburton; "Lonely Jack"; Lovett, Harold S.; McAdams, W. B.; McGrath, Jack W.; MacDonald, Tony; MacNamee, Alva I.; Madsen, Sgt. E. E.; Martel, Leon H.; Nelson, Frank Lovell; O'Hara, Jack; Parker, G. A.; Parker, Dr. M.; Parrott, Pvt. D. C.; Phillips, Corbett, C.; Rich, Wagoner Bob; Rinkenbach, Frank; Rundle, Merrill G.; Schmidt, G.; Scott, Pvt. James P.; Stremple, H. E.; Swan, George L.; Tripp, Edward N.; Van Tyler, Chester; Von Gelucke, Byron; Ward, Frank B.; Wheeler, S. H.; Williams, W. P.; Zorek, Leon; J. C. H.; L. T. 348; S. 177284; 439; WS-XV.

PLEASE send us your present address. Letters forwarded to you at address given us do not reach you.—Address L. B. BARRETTO, care of *Adventure*.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

MID-AUGUST ISSUE

Besides the Saharan serial described on the second contents page of this issue, the Mid-August *Adventure* contains the following stories of daring men in dangerous places.

THE VOID SPACES — ***By Samuel Alexander White***

Despite the enmity of a rival fur trader, *David Thompson* sets out to map the void spaces of the Northwest.

IN THE DARK — ***By L. J. Montross***

Silky Mullins' best friend is a man he's fought and chummed with in two countries and hasn't seen yet.

SPARING THE FAMILY TREE — ***By W. C. Tuttle***

A story of curious capers in the sagebrush country.

KINGS OF THE MISSOURI Part II — ***By Hugh Pendexter***

Jim Bridger with his band of Rocky Mountain Men invades the unknown Wyoming country in search of fur.

WHEN THE STORM-FLAGS FLUTTER — ***By R. de S. Horn***

A tale of those fearless men in the U. S. Revenue-Cutter Service who face death daily.

SANTA CLAUS FROM HADES — ***By E. S. Pladwell***

An ancient Western bad man trims his white whiskers and seeks trouble in the land that once feared his name.

USELESS — ***By George L. Catton***

After you've read this, you'll not be so likely to ask of any man, "What use is he?" An Off-the-Trail story.

THE ARMADILHO — ***By Arthur O. Friel***

Armadillos as a rule don't fight. But blood flows when this one meets the head-hunters of the Javary River.

THE REST CURE — ***By Farnham Bishop***

North Sea tactics in Latin America.